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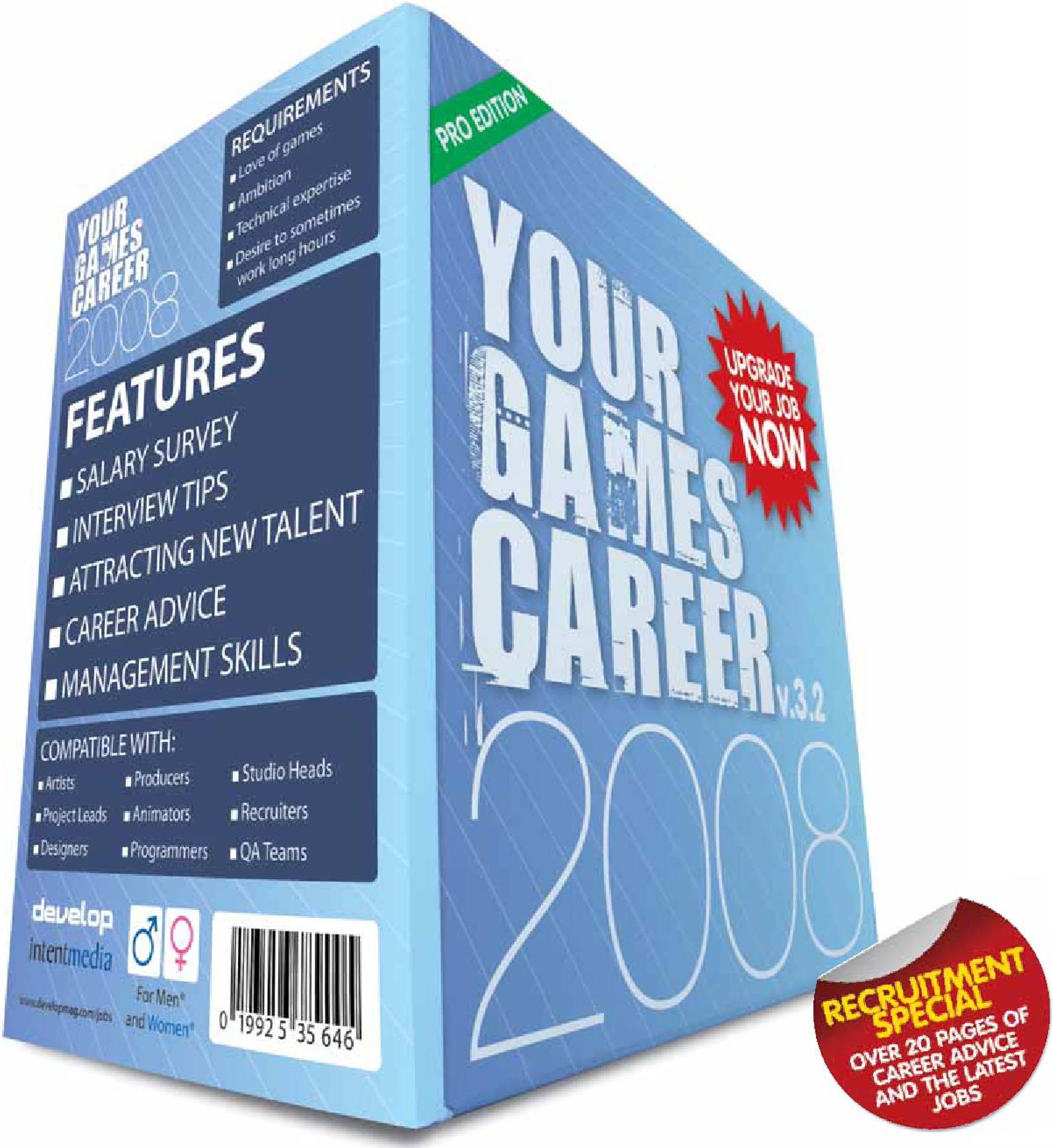
REQUIREMENTS
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Ambition
Technical expertise
Desire to sometimes work long hours
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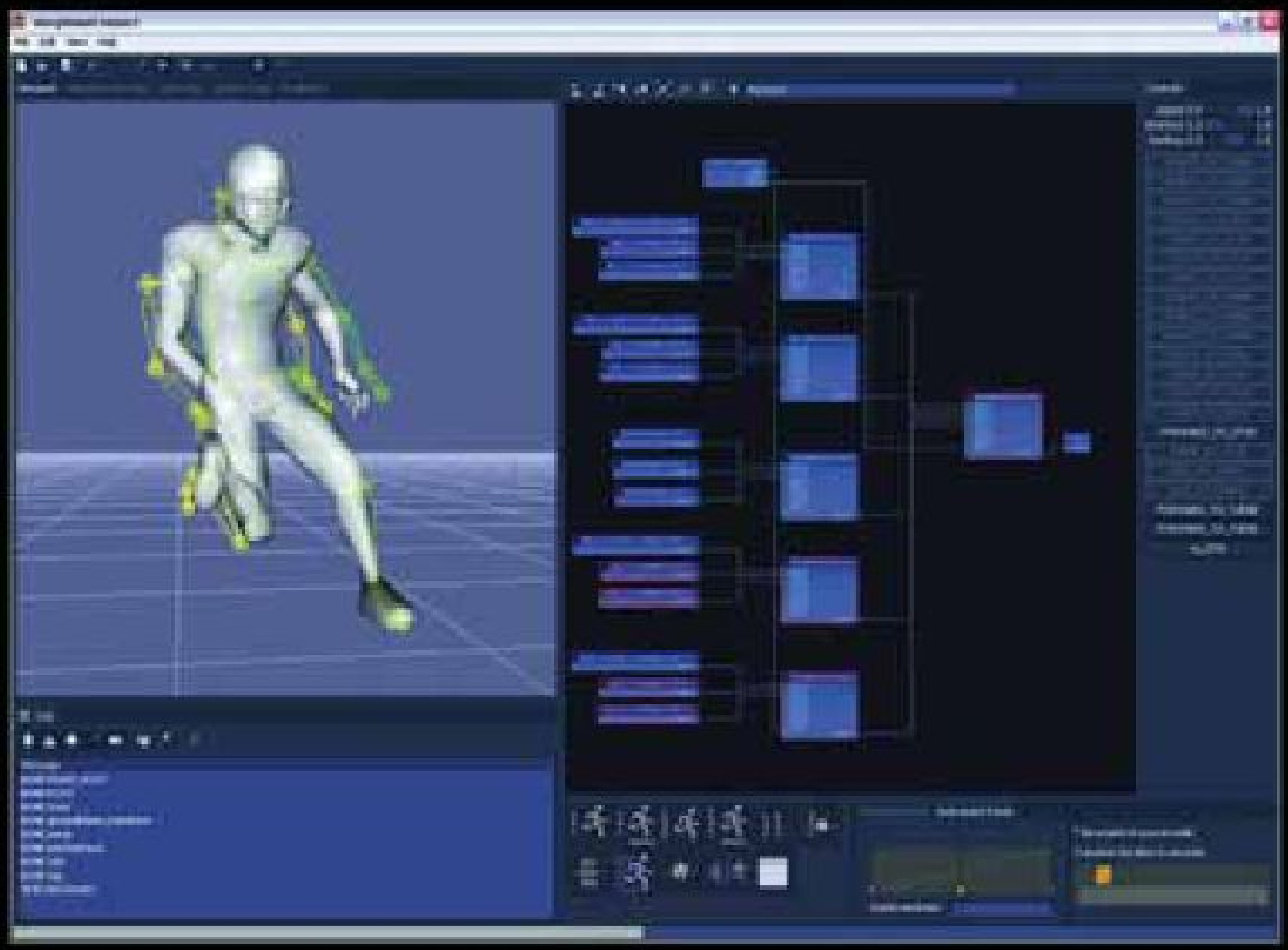
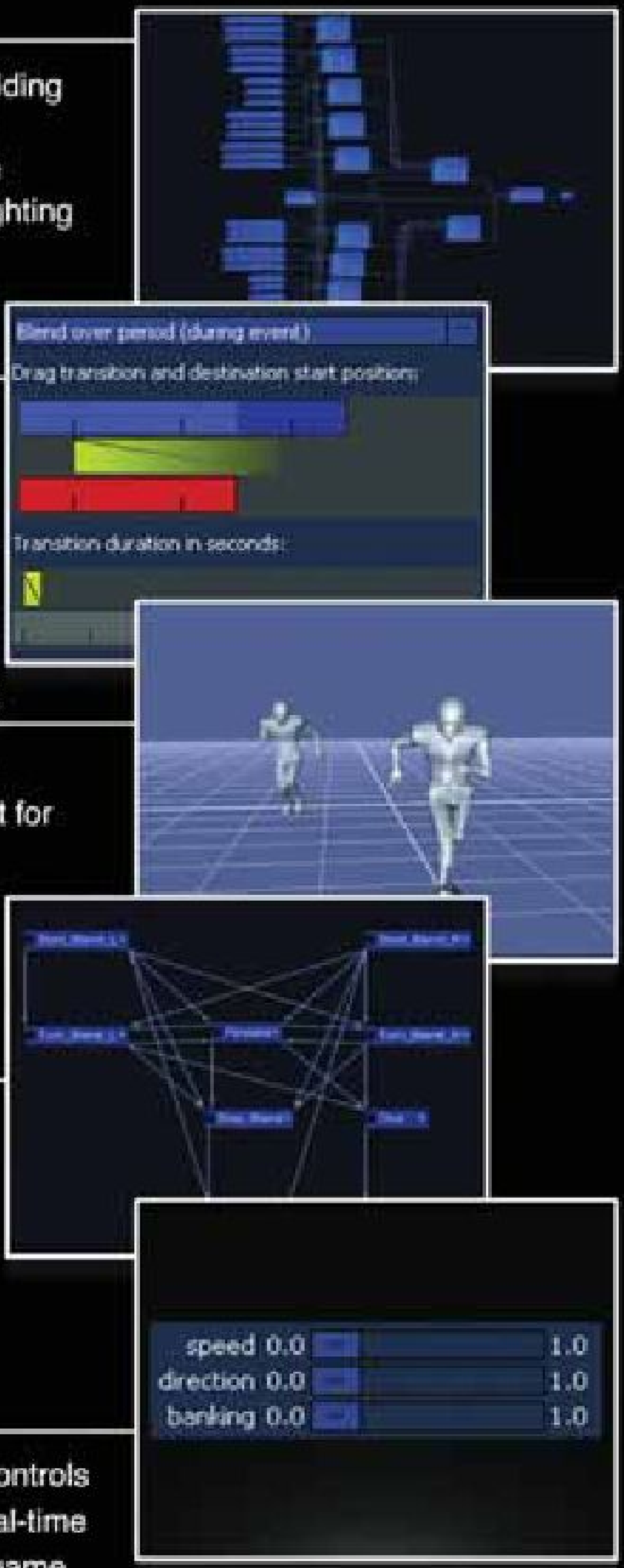


morpheme is the industry's first graphically authorable animation engine. **morpheme** consists of **morpheme:runtime**: an advanced runtime animation engine for PLAYSTATION®3, Xbox 360™, Wii™ and PC. **morpheme:connect**: a highly-customizable 3D authoring application.

morpheme gives animators and developers unprecedented control over the look and feel of their animations in-game: blends, transitions, compression, etc. can all be previewed and modified graphically in **morpheme:connect** and live on the target platform.

morpheme:runtime ships with full source code and integrates seamlessly with euphoria, NaturalMotion's Dynamic Motion Synthesis technology.

For more information, visit www.naturalmotion.com


Blend over period (during event)
Drag transition and destination start position:
Transition duration in seconds:
speed 0.0 1.0
direction 0.0 1.0
banking 0.0 1.0

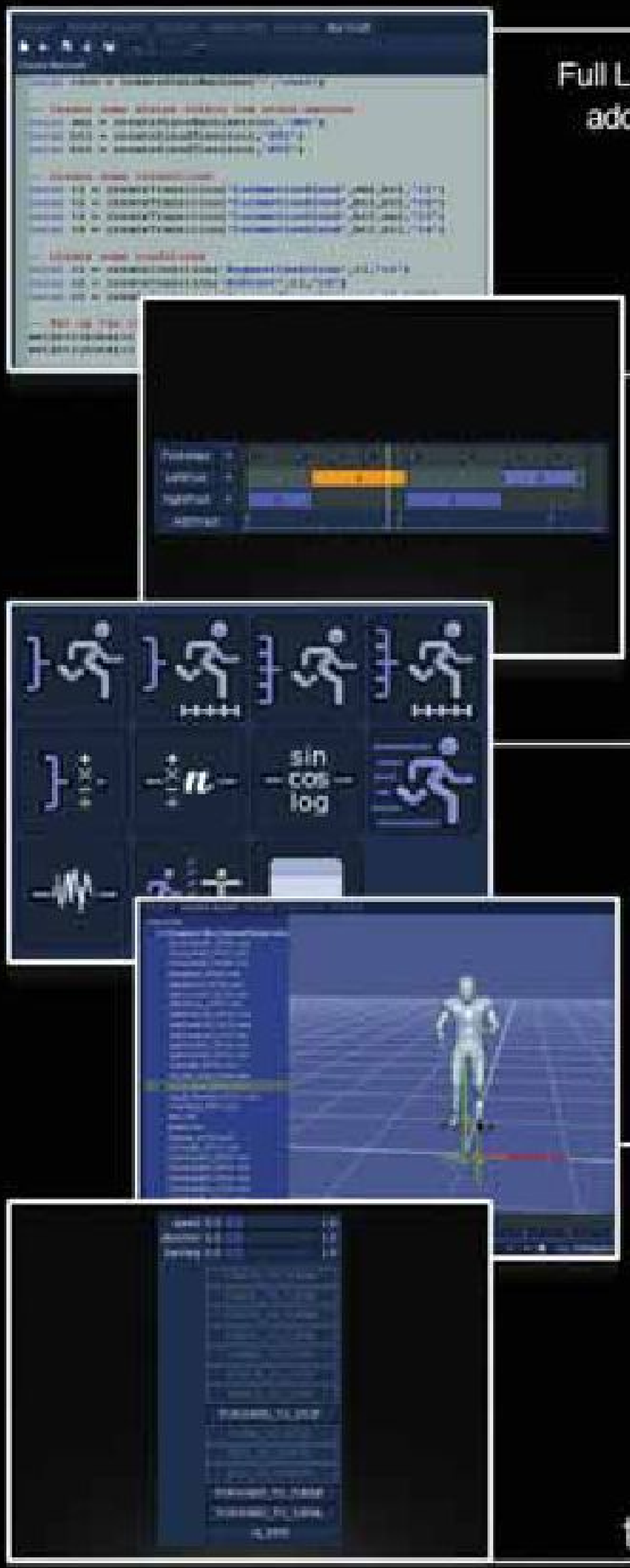
blend tree
Advanced graphical tools for building complex blend trees. Real-time visualization of animation source contribution through node highlighting

blending
Graphical control of transition blending between states in the transition graph

multiple characters
Visualization of multiple runtime characters in morpheme:connect for easy authoring and analysis of character interaction

network
Advanced graphical tools for creating and visualizing transition networks through drag-and-drop

control parameters
Exposure of custom high-level controls for entire animation system. Real-time manipulation through sliders or game pad controller



scripting
Full Lua scripting for automating tasks, adding AI logic or polling game pads for real-time input

timeline
Graphical mark up of animation data to add one-shot and duration events, for highlighting footfalls, sound effects, etc.

node palette
Advanced blend notes (time-warp) for dragging and dropping into transition network. Fully customizable node types through C++ and scripting

animation browser
Easy browsing and selection (drag & drop) of source animation. Animation list is automatically updated to reflect changed source files (after editing in Maya)

transition requests
Exposure of custom transition messages. In-tool emulation of interaction between morpheme:runtime and game AI system

naturalmotion

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WITH THIS ISSUE:
Develop Insider
An in-depth tour of the Kuju
Entertainment studio network

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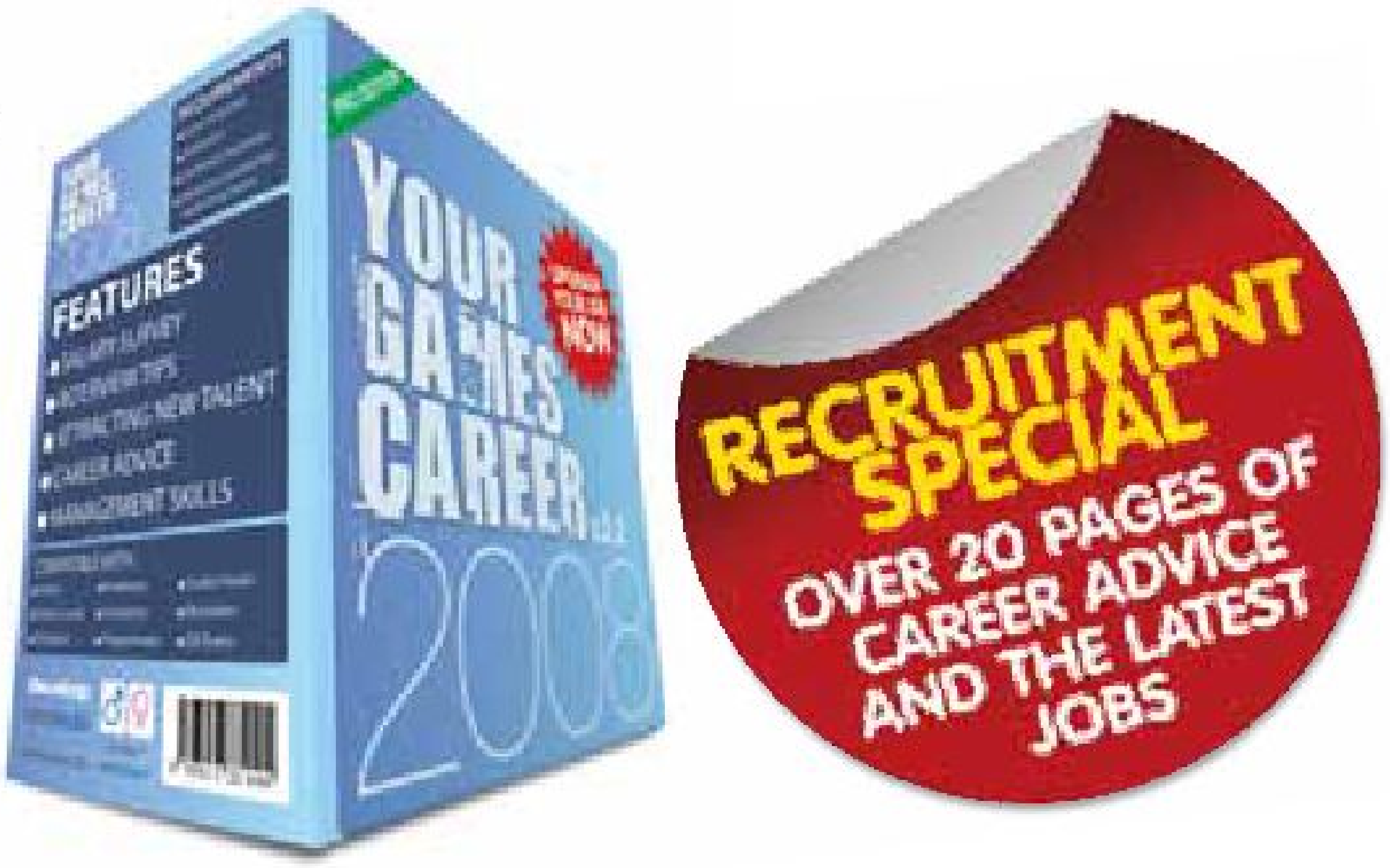

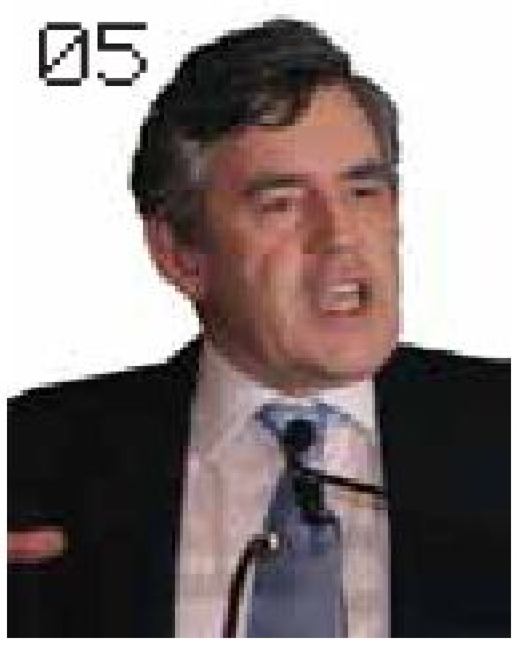
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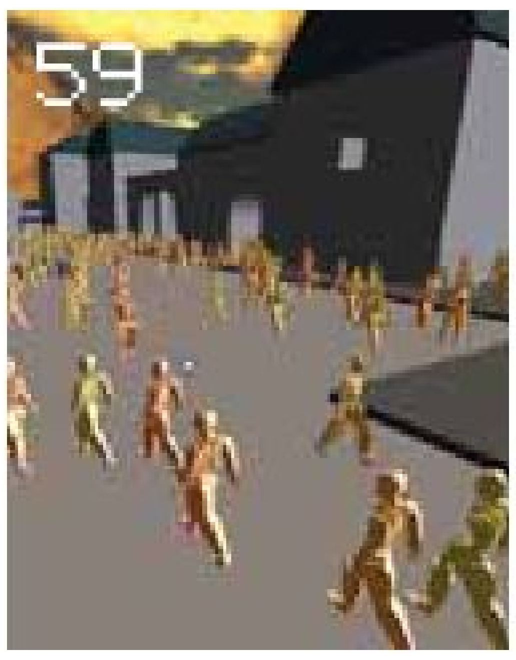
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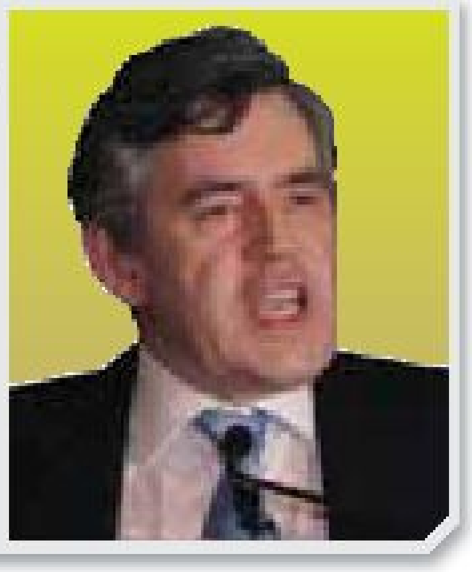

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'We love WiiWare'

Independent studios the world over are out in force backing Nintendo's soon-to-launch distribution platform

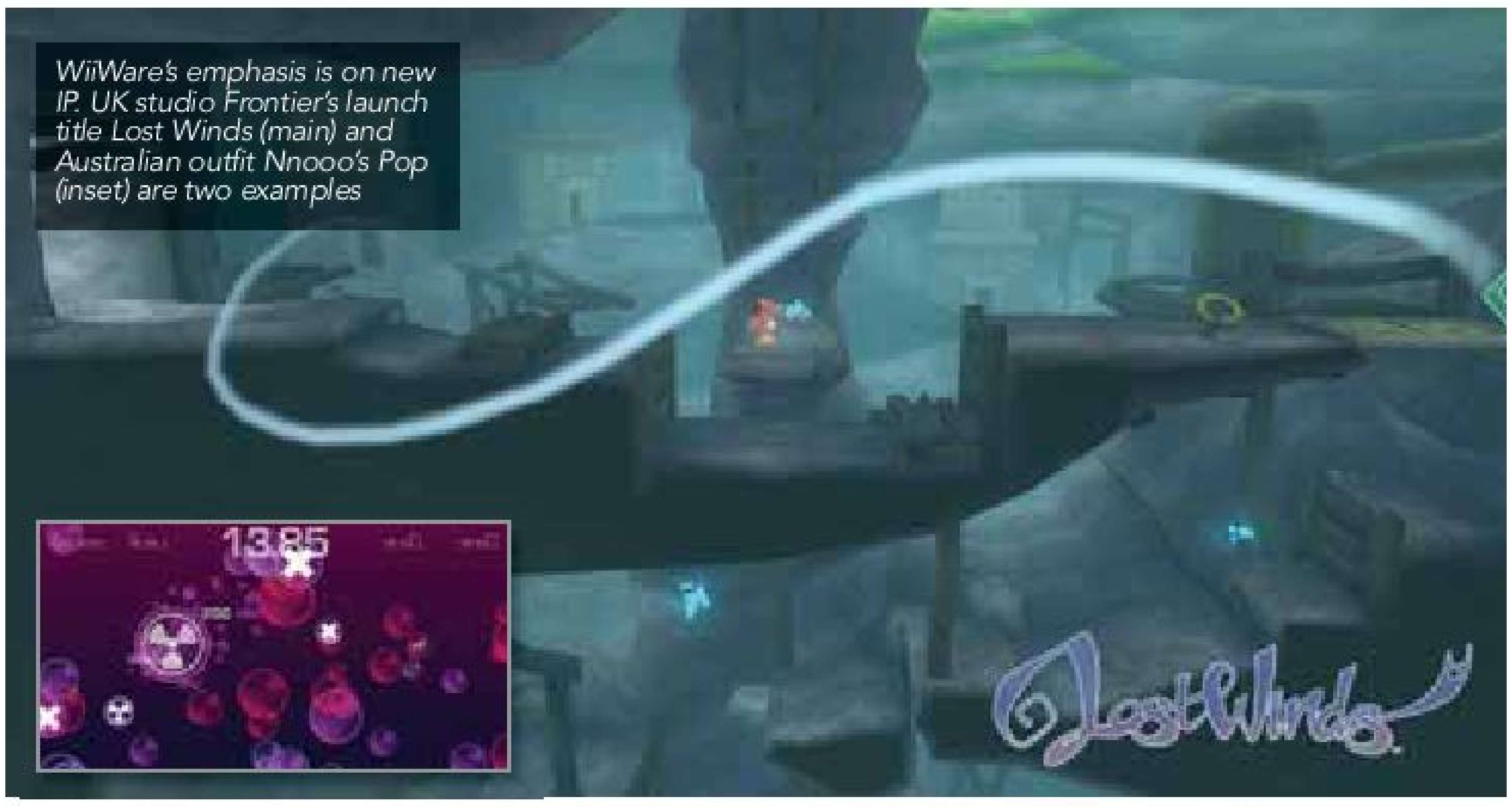
by Michael French

Does the ascent of Nintendo know no bounds? Seems not.

Following sell out success of its Wii and DS platforms over the past 18 months, sparking a massive tide-change amongst the publishing community towards releasing games for the Kyoto firm's platforms, it seems the company's imminent WiiWare platform has made good on its promise and won the hearts of independent developers the world over.

For a platform that actually puts more responsibility on the shoulders of indie developers – effectively giving them publisher-like duties by leaving them to sort out localisation, QA, marketing and ESRB/PEGI ratings – the speed with which studios have embraced the service may come as a surprise to some, but not those in the development community itself.

WiiWare, according to David Braben of Frontier – which is providing launch game *LostWinds* for the channel's May 19th US launch – has seriously changed the production process of game development.



WiiWare's emphasis is on new IP. UK studio Frontier's launch title Lost Winds (main) and Australian outfit Nnooo's Pop (inset) are two examples

"With *LostWinds* we have been able to significantly streamline the development process. One huge advantage was the fact that we could test gameplay of the game, without having to make it beautiful – as we generally would in a publishing relationship," he told *Develop* at GDC. "This has enabled us to get the project off the ground much quicker than we would otherwise. Costs also come down to what is needed to be made within the game."

The result, he adds, is that "*LostWinds* is a very focused game, so not only is it ideal for the WiiWare service, but is also therefore cheaper to develop."

> ***"Nintendo is undercutting Xbox Live and PlayStation Network..."***

Cheaper, accessible development was of course what the Wii was all about from its inception and subsequent arrival – but the bar has been lowered further with WiiWare to entice a number of new studios, or at least those that were previously without the financial capability to develop a console title, towards being Nintendo allies.

Canadian outfit XGen is one of those studios. Skye Boyes, president and CEO of the company which has made Flash games seen on MySpace, EA's Pogo and Kongregate, commented: "WiiWare presents an opportunity for studios to enter the console market with a relatively small development budget, and the ability to justify greater risk with innovative or unproven game designs. As an independent casual developer in our fifth year, the jump into console development would have previously required a massive infusion of capital and at least some loss of control over our vision."

Plus, Nintendo isn't just attracting talent with an aspirational message – it's undercutting the competition, Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network, as well.

"We found trying to get a downloadable title approved on other platforms prohibitively expensive as we needed to supply artwork and demos just to be looked at. If that demo is not signed we could have spent three to six months worth of development money and be nowhere," said Nic Watt of Australian outfit Nnooo, working on upcoming WiiWare game *Pop*, adding: "We can purchase two to four Wii development kits for the price of one Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 dev kit."

ONLINE EXTRA
Want to know more about why studios love WiiWare? Head to our site for a series of special features profiling the popular platform
www.developmag.com

WORLD*VIEW* GLOBAL NEWS > p08

Editorial

Power supply

According to those closely watching the march of consolidation sweeping the industry, power is concentrating in the hands of a shrinking number of big players. The imminent marriage creating Activision Blizzard and the prospect of an EA/Take Two merger prove this claim, they say.

And who am I to argue with analysts and pundits – to a great extent they are right. But this should not be painted as some 'rise of the overlords' situation.

As physical distribution and retail becomes less relevant (yet not irrelevant) to the games this industry produces, I think the last few months have also proven that the view of 'them versus us' that used to blight publisher/developer relationships (whatever side you are on) is gone, and power has really become more spread out, with more of it in the hands of studios and individual developers than ever before.

Take for instance, the comments from former SCi CEO Jane Cavanagh in this magazine a few months back touting a globally shared tech base – which was to all intents a mangement decision of creative direction incorrectly influenced by money – and contrast it with new CEO Phil Rogers' plan to restructure the company towards a 'studio-led' model which champions the wheat over the chaff.

The Activision Blizzard and latest EA developments only take the point further, in fact. That Blizzard has been so forcefully placed at the centre of the new (but still to be finalised) corporation proves the value of the development team's independent hard work ethic over those studios managed by publisher-owner Vivendi.

Even Electronic Arts' CEO John Riccitiello will agree that 'city-state' individualism amongst studios is the best way to encourage good games development – it's why he spent big on Pandemic and wants to have Rockstar, the fiercest of development brands, as part of his stable. (The strategy works for independents, too, as proven by our special *Develop Insider* guide included with this issue profiling Kuju's six different, individual teams.)

And if industry rumours that big budget games like *Killzone 2* and *Star Wars Unleashed* are being 'indulged' with a total budget of over $100m between them are true, I think it all signifies a maturation not just of the business of games, but also the the attitudes towards fostering talent in the games industry – and also an acceptance that the true power lies with the creatives, not just the people signing the cheques.

Michael French

michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

Michael

UK gamers petition Brown for tax break

Prime Minister Gordon Brown could soon be facing pressure from consumers to reaffirm his commitment to the industry's commercial weight

by Michael French

The campaign for a UK tax break helping games developers has spilt over the boundaries of the industry into the minds of the consumers – with a group of gamers starting a petition aimed at Prime Minister Gordon Brown demanding he look into the possibility of implementing tax breaks for the games industry.

Started by 20 year-old 3D animator Dan Spence, the petition has been spurred by the recent restructuring of SCi (*Develop Newsflash, February 29th*), which has seen the studio move part of its production and QA team to Montreal and also downsize part of its operation.

Spence contacted trade association Tiga, asking both outgoing CEO Fred Hasson and his newly-appointed replacement Richard Wilson to help get the word out to studios in the UK that consumers care about the industry, too.

"I found it disheartening that SCi was moving a significant chunk of their operations outside the UK. And at the same time in the rest of the world I see so much growth," the fan of British-made IPs such as *WipEout*, *Tomb Raider*, *Croc* and *Broken Sword* told us.

Although Spence, like many developers in the UK, isn't sure whether the future of UK development is under such serious threat that a tax break would be necessary to keep it alive, he does think it would be a great step towards encourage it to prosper further.

"I'm in two minds," he said. "On one hand I see new studios like Media Molecule – who formed out of Lionhead – and Splash Damage – who broke in through the mod scene – manage to thrive on great ideas. There are still clearly financial risks being taken and I hardly think the UK is any serious danger of losing its identity as the third largest producer of games in the world. However I think it will have a phenomenal effect in the long term by helping independents get started, creating more original intellectual properties and attracting the larger publishers to fund their triple-A games in the UK."

Either way, Spence hopes the petition can gather enough support and momentum to help raise awareness of the industry's commercial power, if nothing else: "I see the government is offering tax relief for UK movies but for some reason the games industry has been set aside. I find this so hard to believe considering the strength in output from UK studios.

"I'm hoping word of mouth between private developer networks will work in my favour. That's under the assumption they support the idea. I'll also be canvasing relevant press outlets to get the gamers behind the idea. I hope to explain to people out there that this industry has grown up, that it is a strong creative and technical industry that should be brought in line with other entertainment industries."

View the petition online at **http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/ukgames/**

Who wants to win a Develop Award?

Lobbying is now open for July 30th event taking place in Brighton

Above: 500 games industry execs attended 2007's Develop Awards

The Develop Industry Excellence Awards this year take place on Wednesday, July 30th.

The awards are still the only completely peer-voted event rewarding the achievements of European games developers. The event takes place alongside the Develop conference and expo, which runs from July 29th to 31st.

For 2008, we've added a brand new award recognising the achievements in the games development and education field, and also a Technical Innovation prize that acknowledges the market's continued advancement in technological competency, be that in tools, design or online.

Elsewhere, the highly contested prizes for best independent developer, best in-house developer, best tools provider and publishing hero are once again up for grabs. After debuting last year, the Visual Arts and Audio Accomplishment awards also return. And then, of course, there's the Grand Prix, which singles out the overall best achievement by a company working in Europe's booming games development field.

Big winners last year were Realtime Worlds, SCEE, Havok and Ubisoft.

To lobby for a nomination (*see full list of awards, right*) write up about 300 words or so on your achievements in the past 12 months and mail *Michael.French@intentmedia.co.uk*

Questions about sponsorship, or booking a table at the event to should through to Jodie Holdway at BHPR: +44 (0)1462 456780 or *Jodie.Holdway@bhpr.co.uk*

www.developmag.com/develop-awards

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Best Use of a Licence
Visual Arts
Audio Accomplishment
Publishing Hero

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Tools Provider
Technical Innovation
Services and Outsourcing
Recruitment Company
Games:Edu New Talent Award

Studios
Best New UK/European Studio
Business Development
Best Independent Developer
Best In-house Developer

Industry
Industry Legend
Grand Prix

The world's 100 best studios named next month

As if the mounting excitment around the 2008 Develop Awards weren't enough, next month also sees the publication of our yearly *Develop 100* book.

A must-read amongst the global publishing and development community, the Develop 100 is produced using ChartTrack/ELSPA sales data and in association with legal firm Sheridans, the book offers a definitive list of the most commercially-successful studios around the world, ranked in terms of the sale of their games at UK retail, the third-biggest market for games on the planet.

You can get involved, too: we have limited advertising opportunties available. To find out more contact *Katie.Rawlings@intentmedia.co.uk*

www.develop100.com

develop
100

DATA BYTES

50,000

The number of mobile games SKUs 'developed' by Gameloft each month (five games a month, ported to 1,000 phones in 10 languages).

Source: Michel Guillemot, Gameloft CEO

14

The number of projects cancelled by SCi as part of its corporate restructure, which moves the firm to a 'studio-led' model, and will see staff reduced by 25 per cent to 800 employees

Source: SCi

15

The number of projects Capcom USA says it has in the works as part of an ambitious ramp up of its production slate. It's unlikely that they've scooped up the SCi titles – although the campaign for a Marvel-style Eidos vs Capcom game starts (and probably ends) here

Source: Capcom USA

1,000,000,000

Amount of Achievements unlocked by Xbox 360 owners

Source: Microsoft

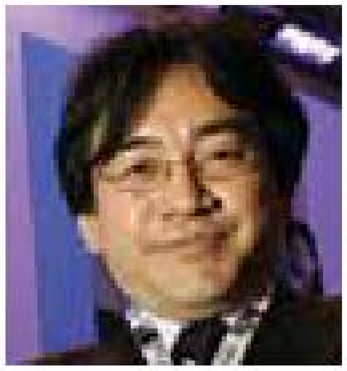
WorldView

Our regular round up of development stories from across the globe...

//comments

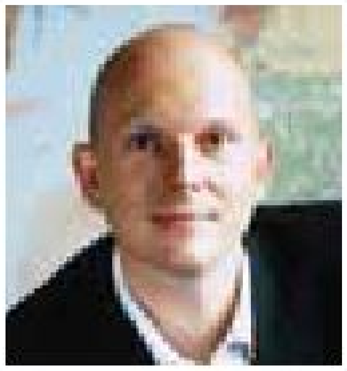
Peter Molyneux doesn't mince his words when discussing Fable 2's innovations at his GDC talk

"Mini-maps are shit. They're shit because you make these multi-million dollar games, and yet people play them staring at these little dots the whole time..."



Nintendo may be the leading publisher of Wii software, but that doesn't mean they want a monopoly, says president Satoru Iwata.

"It's undeniably in the customers' best interest for other creators to come in and make things that have us writhing around saying 'Why didn't we think of that?'..."



SCE Worldwide Studios president Phil Harrison's departing statement has the dev world blinking back the tears

"The past years at SCE have been the defining journey of my life. I am so proud of everything PlayStation has achieved, and will continue to support its future in any way that I can..."

Free Trial Downloads

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Microsoft has unveiled Xbox Live Community Games, a service that will allow XNA developers to upload their creations to be played by any of the ten million Xbox Live members.

"18 months ago, we revolutionised the industry by democritising game development with XNA," said XNA lead Chris Satchell on unveiling the service at GDC. "Now it's time to democratise game distribution. And to do that, we need to put the power in the hands of the community."

As such, the distribution service will not be controlled by Microsoft, but by the community itself. Developers create the game in XNA Game Studio 2.0 as usual, but once the title has been completed, developers can upload their game to the service and set content descriptors that show the level of certain types of content in the game.

It then enters a peer review process where other Creators Club members assess the game's content and the accuracy of the descriptors, after which the game is available for all to play.

"We talked about our vision back at GDC 2004, and I really think we've more than delivered on that vision. This year we complete it by connecting all those creators in the community with the audience of Xbox Live," concluded Satchell.

creators.xna.com

REDWOOD SHORES, CA

EA has revealed a new group focused on games for social networks. The small team, known as EA Blueprint, is housed at EA's Redwood Shores facility and is headed by former EALA general manager Neil Young and Alan Yu, EA's head of artist and repertoire.

EA Blueprint will work on both new IP and extensions of existing properties. According to GameTap, one proof of concept title already exists – *Facebook Smarty Pants*, a version of EA's Wii quiz IP co-created with social app studio Context Optional.

"We focus on creating IP in new ways for our media and finding smart ways to spread it across the media landscape," Young told *Variety*. "We want to find a new way to make games with smaller teams." According to *Variety*, the aim is for EA to be able to 'get out of its creative rut by taking risks, somewhat along the lines of a studio speciality division such as Fox Searchlight or Miramax.'

www.ea.com

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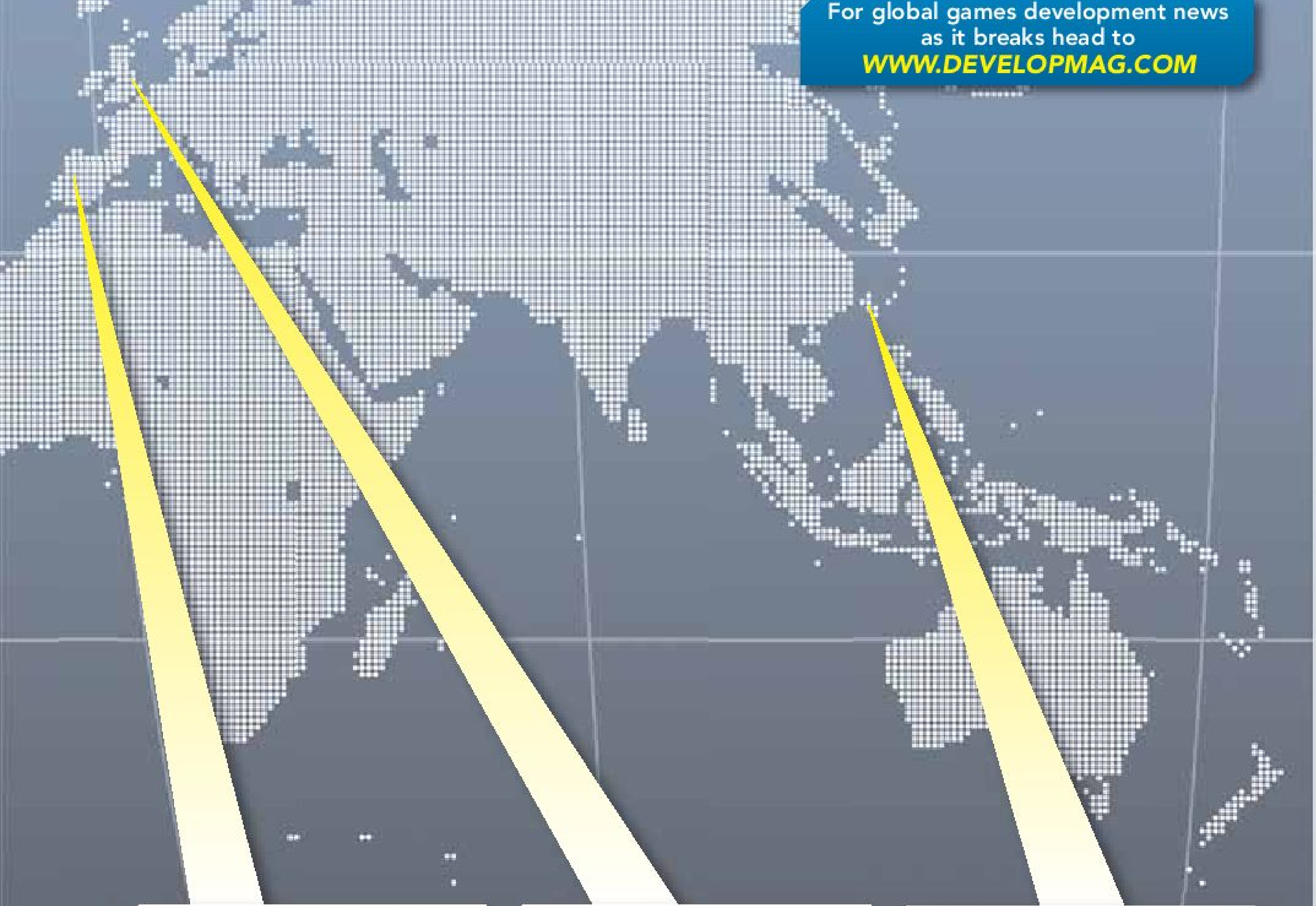

MADRID, SPAIN

More EA news this month as the company opened a large testing centre in Madrid, which will employ between 200 and 400 people from 20 European countries. Madrid was apparently chosen due to its 'geographical location and popularity as a travel destination,' said Sky News.

"We decided several years ago that we needed to centralise all of our services," said EA's international VP for development services, Jaime Gine.

The centre will be in charge of translating EA's English-language games into 17 European languages.

www.ea.com

HERTFORDSHIRE, UK

Looking for a publisher for your casual game? There may be an unlikely partner poised to enter the game – Dixons Store Group. According to an interview conducted by sister magazine *MCV* with DSGi's David F Johnson, the firm has grand plans of casual game distribution both digitally and physically in its stores.

"We're looking for developers large and small, even the two or three people groups," he said. "I'd love to get a success like the next *Bejewelled*, and I'd love to take it platform holders to see if we could get it on Xbox Live."

www.dsgiplc.com

SAPPORO, JAPAN

Square Enix has announced plans to open a dedicated mobile studio in Sapporo, the main city on the northern island of Hokkaido. The studio will be lead by current head of mobile business Yoichi Haraguchi, and plans to grow to 20 staff within its first year.

Square Enix is already heavily involved with the mobile business, its internal teams having not only ported old *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* games to the platform but also created entirely new instalments of the series such as *Final Fantasy VII: Before Crisis* and the recently released *Final Fantasy IV* sequel *The After.*

www.square-enix.com

GLOBAL REPORTS

US: GT-EA

Probably the biggest industry news this month was the very public revelation that EA had offered to purchase Take Two for $2 billion, only to be turned down several times as far back as 2007. Take Two's official word is that the $2 billion figure "substantially undervalues Take Two's robust and enviable stable of game franchises."

It offered to commence talks with EA on April 30th, the day after *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s release, but claims that EA has refused – leading Take Two to believe that EA is only interested in acquiring the publisher "at a significant discount" rather than providing an offer that properly considers its value.

www.take2games.com

SINGAPORE: UBISOFT

Ubisoft has announced plans to open its 18th internal development studio, choosing Singapore as the location. The studio is currently being built with a view to opening this summer, and Ubisoft plans the facility to eventually house 300 employees. It will work with other Ubisoft studios on portable and console titles.

www.ubisoft.com

UK: BIZARRE CHARITY

Project Gotham Racing developer Bizarre has pledged to participate in four events designed to raise money for Marie Curie Cancer Care. Last year the developer raised over £6000 for charity, and is hoping that the studio's fans will sponsor enough to surpass that this year. More details can be found at the address below.

www.bizarrecreations.com

US: IRON LORE CLOSES

American studio Iron Lore, best known for its PC game *Titan Quest,* has shut its doors after being unable to secure funding for its next project. It had just finished development of the upcoming *Dawn of War: Soulstorm* for THQ.

www.ironlore.com

US: REBEL PC ALLIANCE

Epic, Microsoft and Activision have teamed up with hardware companies AMD, Nvidia and Intel and PC manufacturers such as Dell and Alienware to create the PC Gaming Alliance, a body to promote the PC's use as a games platform and to change the perception that the PC is dwindling when compared to consoles.

www.pcgamingalliance.org

develop DIARY

UPCOMING EVENTS

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE
June 18th and 19th
www.gamehorizonconference.com
A Newcastle-based event for execs

MAY '08

NORDIC GAME CONFERENCE
May 14th and 15th
Malmo, Sweden
www.nordicgame.com

JUNE 2008

GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE
June 18th and 19th
Newcastle, UK
www.gamehorizon.net

PARIS GDC
June 23rd to 24th
Paris, France
www.parisgdc.com

JULY 2008

E3 SUMMIT 2008
July 15th to 17th
Los Angeles, USA
www.e3expo.com

DEVELOP CONFERENCE
July 15th to 17th
Brighton, UK
www.developconference.com

DEVELOP INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
July 30th
Brighton, UK
www.developmag.com/develop-awards

XNA GAMEFEST
July 22nd and 23rd
Seattle, USA
www.xnagamefest.com

CASUAL CONNECT AMERICA
July 23rd to 25th
Seattle, USA
seattle.casualconnect.org

AUGUST 2008

SIGGRAPH
August 11th to 15th
Los Angeles, USA
www.siggraph.org

GCDC 2008
August 18th to 20th
Leipzig, Germany
www.gcdc.eu

GAMES CONVENTION
August 20th to 24th
Leipzig, Germany
www.gc-germany.com

SEPTEMBER 2008

AUSTIN GDC
September 15th to 18th
Texas, USA
www.gdconf.com

CHINA GDC 08
September 24th to 26th
Beijing, China
www.gdcchina.cn

OCTOBER 2008

TOKYO GAME SHOW
October 9th to 12th
Tokyo, Japan
tgs.cesa.org.jp/english/

FORWARD PLANNER

NEXT ISSUE: #82
APRIL 2008

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- *SPECIAL FOCUS: Asset management*
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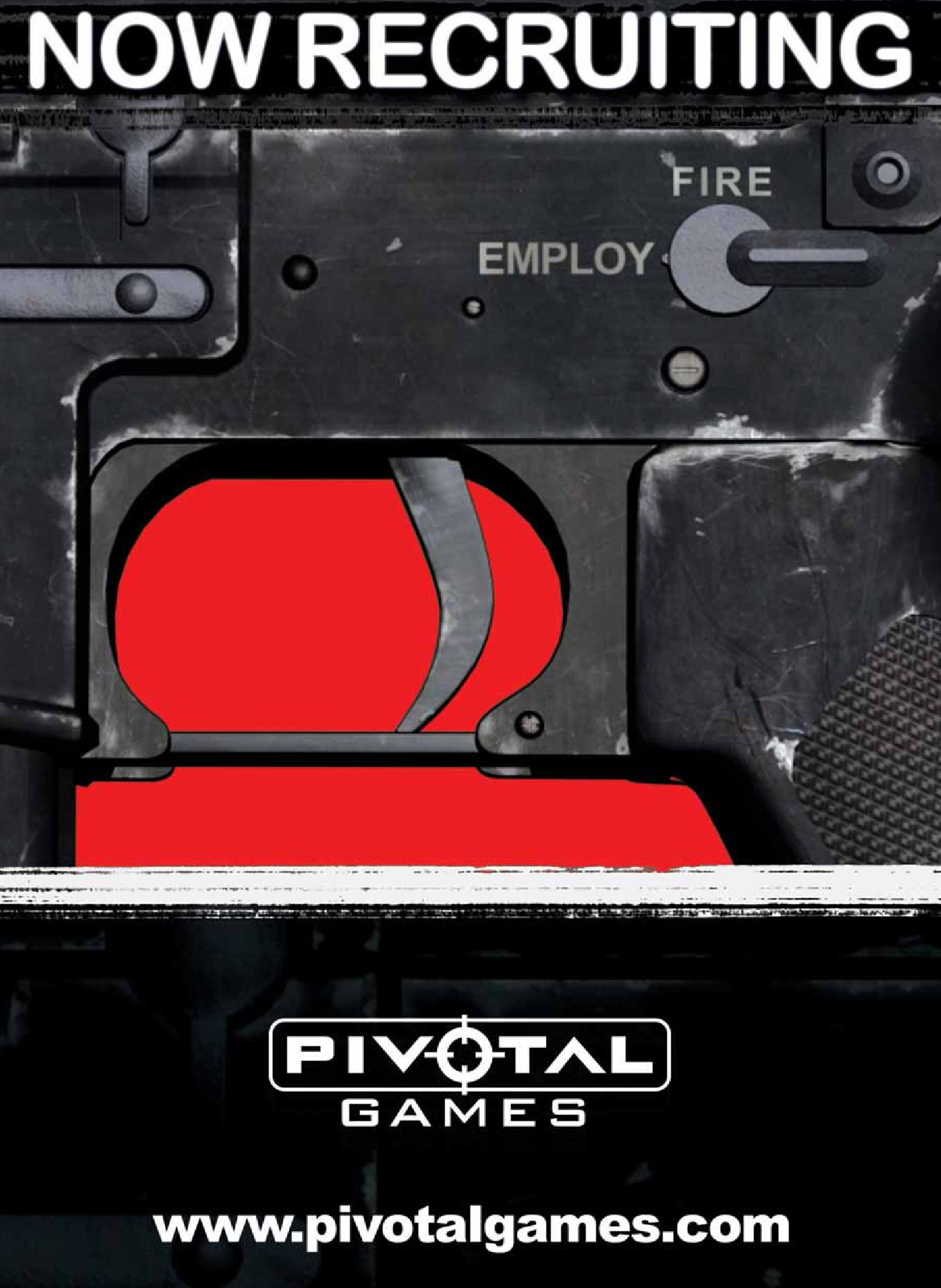
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VARIABLE DECLARATIONS

by Owain Bennallack

Your new designer has never heard of Manic Miner

I'm writing this just ahead of GDC. Perusing the conference schedule, one session jumps out: 'How to Create an Industry: The Making of the Brown Box and *PONG*'. I'm not sure if the lecture is meant to sound quite so scatological, but schoolboy humour shouldn't be the only temptation for younger attendees.

On stage will be Ralph H. Baer, the electrical engineer who in 1968 finished prototyping the world's first electronic console, later modified and sold by Magnovox as the Odyssey. That same year Atari sent Allan Alcorn's *PONG* coin-op out into the world. Alcorn is set to join Baer on the GDC stage; it'd be no exaggeration to say this is like seeing John Logie Baird address a conference of television executives. Catch these old-timers while you can.

By the time you read this, of course, GDC and this 40-odd-year trip down memory lane will have passed. You may know if young GDC attendees pressed Baer and Alcorn for autographs, or if the session proved an out-of-touch homily to the hippie valley of yesteryear. Maybe Baer and Alcorn settled an old dispute with pistols?

I'm deliberately writing about this talk between anticipation and aftermath, because it sort of parallels where games are. With four decades under their belt, our oldest forebears will soon see the last Game Over flash before their eyes. Yet nobody believes games have done all they can yet – we're all still looking to tomorrow.

Now, much has been written about the consequences of games maturing as a technology or artform, but What About The Workers? Oldies still working in games development are approaching their fifties, even as the current recruitment boom pulls in graduates in their early twenties.

It wasn't long ago that developers were told not to make 'games for themselves', but today even that mission could prove difficult, given these age differences. Producers in their early thirties will tell you it's no longer easy to use the gaming shorthand of even five years ago. Old landmark UK games like *Elite*, *Head over Heels* and even Bullfrog's *Dungeon Keeper* are unknown (and certainly unplayed) by most newcomers to development.

Ralph H. Baer stands proudly with his creation – but how many of today's new recruits even know what the Odyssey is?

> **"Old landmark UK games like Elite, Head over Heels and even Bullfrog's Dungeon Keeper are unknown (and certainly unplayed) by most newcomers to development…"**

Indeed, next year will be the 20th anniversary of Bullfrog's *Populous*, a fact that beggars believe to those who grew up with Amigas, but likely to elicit a response of "Popu-who?" from the talented young level designer in the corner.

Does it matter that the seminal games of my generation sound like sixties psychedelic bands to today's young punks? No, and yes. It's great that new blood is entering the industry, but there are several interesting ramifications.

Because game developers routinely use other games as shorthand for everything from gameplay mechanics to look-and-feel and even the immersive sensation in the likes of *Elite*, communication becomes more difficult – something that's not to be dismissed in the absence of an established 'grammar' for games.

This lack of universal access to the greats of the past is unique to games. Young authors routinely read Austen and Dickens, while aspirant musicians grow up on the sounds of the sixties and seventies, and every budding filmaker can and should watch the likes of *Citizen Kane* and *Bonnie and Clyde*.

But even if games are theoretically accessible via emulation or regurgitation on new formats like mobile or Xbox Live Arcade, shifting standards, tastes and the sheer amount of time needed to play games like *Zork* or *Ultima V* means most will rarely find themselves experienced again.

Magazines (plus the vast museum cum mausoleum of the internet) help keep old names in circulation, but you wonder if there isn't a case for a more formal gaming cannon. No doubt it's been proposed already by some misty-eyed old greybeard at GDC, but a quick Google only brings up Jon Hare's *Cannon Fodder* (you should play it, kids).

A few years ago I was invited to India to present some lectures on the history of games to an audience of game art outsourcers who were having trouble understanding client pitches, and phrases like "Not so brown as *Quake*". With that game's distinctive hue first hitting impressionable UK minds over a decade ago now, I wonder if the next request for a catch-up course will come from somewhere rather closer to home.

Owain Bennallack is executive editor of *Develop*. He edited the magazine from its launch until its February 2006 issue. He has also worked at *MCV* and *Edge*, and has provided consultancy and evaluation services to several leading developers and publishers. He is also chairman of the *Develop* conference advisory board.

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

by Rick Gibson

All that glitters… beneath the surface of France's tax break

France's tax credit may have been approved by the EU, but many remain sceptical

December's EU decision to allow the French tax break for eligible games production appears, on the surface, to be a victory for a government trying to protect its games development industry from the threat of globalisation.

There's no doubt this threat looms over many territories and many will call for such a scheme's introduction in the UK. France has borne the brunt of that threat in recent years. Its development sector collapsed, in part because Quebec offered massive tax breaks for games development, as well as subsidies and even income tax holidays for emigrating games developers. In a further twist of the knife into the back of the French development industry, the Quebecois offered an additional tax break for Francophone studios.

So surely a tax break for French studios is a much needed shot in the arm? Not so fast…

Yes, a tax break for games will definitely help French games studios attract finance and publishing deals by reducing their cost base, even though their scheme offers just over half as much assistance as Montreal's. But the French need to learn from their past to make the scheme work.

France's games industry was in trouble before Montreal started calling. Its independent sector was shrinking rapidly just like every other major development territory. Beyond a few major hits, France had real problems creating global blockbusters. Many of its games studios had become dependent on grants and hand outs, mostly from local government but also from national funds. Grants totalling hundreds of millions of Euros were being poured into games companies, some without commercially viable products.

Essentially classic French protectionism, some of their studios were being propped up artificially while the global market ignored their products. Eventually, subsidies always run out, and this led some unviable studios, like Cryo and Kalisto, to crash spectacularly. Many of their staff will have ended up in Montreal.

> ***"The French need to learn from their past to make the scheme work…"***

CASH MACHINES

So if hand-outs didn't work before, there is a very real question about whether a new tax break for French studios will actually make their sector more sustainable in the long run. Both larger and smaller studios alike will benefit but, unless commercially viable projects are assisted, the scheme could still fail.

So who decides what projects are funded? The disbursement in France must avoid illegal state aid by ensuring that funded projects are 'cultural' in nature. A scorecard for titles exists, based on a test applied by the Ministry of Culture. I suspect I'm not the only one filled with unease about the idea of a government wielding an effective veto over which games studios make. To be fair, the criteria for funding are fairly generous. Apparently, there's no need for garlic, berets or an Eiffel Tower in every scene, just looser requirements for 'cultural heritage', strong narrative, innovation and original IP – looser but not dissimilar to how films pass the cultural test to receive production credits in the UK.

How will it be funded? ISFE (the pan-European version of ELSPA) campaigned against the tax break, saying that the last time France gave film production a tax break, it slapped a new tax on the consumer at the box office. It's still unclear how France will fund it, but governments give with one hand and take with another.

More fundamental problems exist, most triggered by attaching the label 'cultural' to games. If the French Inland Revenue interprets games as audio-visual products rather than computer software, then there may eventually be ramifications for (amongst other things) development and retail contracts, possibly even import duties on games consoles. That could have a catastrophic impact on this business, with ramifications beyond France. Some argue this is a slippery slope. It's early days, and the full legal and tax implications of the Brussels decision are not yet known, but a firm legal perspective on what they mean is needed.

The big question for UK studios – and one that has always triggered a resounding "No!" from UK ministers – is whether such a UK scheme is possible. In contrast to France, UK studios are currently vibrant, producing commercially viable games and growing fairly healthily. Nevertheless, the sector's sustainability is under threat from globalisation, not least cold callers from Quebec offering all sorts of goodies. Despite its wealth of games talent, the UK, currently sporting the world's highest production costs, badly needs a more level playing field to remain competitive in the long run. Ultimately, the Treasury will decide on any meaningful assistance.

UK government support for the industry is at its lowest for years, but the industry's political profile (for good and ill) is at its highest. It's time to take a positive message to the government about how important the UK's development industry is and why the sector needs support, tempered with strong arguments to maintain the status quo on duties.

Rick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries
www.gamesinvestor.com

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DESIGN DOC

by The Alpenwolf

Innovation and Inertia

GTA *has spurred a raft of copycats. But none of them have come close to their original inspiration*

The game business has never been bigger or more influential; it would take someone who pays more attention to balance sheets than I do to determine if it has ever been more profitable. There haven't been so many TV game ads since the days that George Plimpton was selling Intellivision, and there's more people playing *World of Warcraft* on a daily basis than go to see a movie blockbuster throughout its all-important opening weekend.

And yet, as with so many other things, collective success has sewn what one hopes will not be the seeds of yet another cyclical demise. The enthusiasm of the annual GDC gathering notwithstanding, one has the vague impression of a certain malaise affecting the industry. While some of the mergers and acquisitions and attempted acquisitions made sense, others were a little curious.

Consider EA's offer of $2 billion for Take Two Entertainment. Does it really make more sense to offer that kind of money in order to acquire what are admittedly some pretty spectacular game franchises? I'm not a maths man, but it strikes me that if it's true that Vivendi/Blizzard spent $60 million to develop *World of Warcraft*, EA could produce more than 30 similar MMO games and a whole lot more comparatively simple AAA console titles.

The fact that they'd rather buy than develop certainly doesn't smack of much creative confidence, and is indicative of an industry leader being driven more by the finance department than the product development people. It's understandable to a certain extent, as game companies, like all corporations, have to make money in order to survive – but growth by acquisition can only work so long as someone else is doing the development somewhere. And unfortunately, right now an awful lot of the development seems to be focused on chasing someone else's tail rather than accepting the sort of risks that led to smash hits like *Grand Theft Auto* and *World of Warcraft*.

It's easy to forget that *GTA* was far from a sure thing: at the old CGDC I used to joke with *Computer Gaming World* editor Chris Lombardi about a hypothetical Bloods and Crips game that really wasn't all that far off from the gangster theme of *GTA*. And there was no guarantee that *World of Warcraft* wasn't going to go the way of previous and subsequent MMOs, although Blizzard's decision to base it on a strong franchise and take the time to give the game that additional level of production polish that tends to set apart a Blizzard game certainly helped.

> **"Nowadays a lot of development seems focused on chasing someone else's tail…"**

But in the same way that the innovation that led to the massive success of *Doom* was quickly followed by a host of *Doom* clones, these big hits have caused the decision makers at the various publishers to fund a cornucopia of *GTA* and *Warcraft* clones. And as in the case of real clones – and can you believe that actual cloning really exists now – the clone is almost always less robust than the original.

The persistent nature of the MMO tends to exacerbate this problem. It's bad enough that everyone is trying to imitate *World of Warcraft*, but when 62.3 per cent of the 16 million MMO subscriptions are *WoW* subscriptions, those who finance game development are less willing to take risks even though this is precisely the time that risk-taking is what the market requires.

The difference between MMOs and traditional single player games with multiplayer components is that a few years ago, you could come out with a clone and know that those playing the original would be looking for something new. That's not completely untrue now, but the evolving and persistent nature of the MMO means that it's significantly less true.

It's perhaps important to keep in mind that we've been through this before. Eventually, a new technology will appear to break the apparent stasis and anoint a new king of the hill for a year or three. My money is on AI, but who knows, perhaps it will be something even more outlandish like holograms, or true two-way speech. Or perhaps it will simply be a new genre; I'm still waiting for the first great gaming equivalent of the chick flick to appear and revolutionise the industry, although now that I think about it, perhaps it's already upon us, masquerading under the names Facebook and MySpace. Here's hoping that it won't take the decision makers too long to remember that taking risks is the only dependable road to developing real hits.

The Alpenwolf is a professional game designer who has been active in the industry for 17 years and designed games for some of the largest American and Japanese publishers. He has been known to visit Ironforge in the company of a large white wolf. design@alpenwolf.com

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Mass effect

GDC08 was the event's biggest year ever, with 18,000 attendees through the doors. But, asks **Michael French**, what do the attendant masses tell us about the games development sector's newfound sense of scale?

According to the organisers of this year's GDC, over 18,000 people attended last month's conference – a huge jump over last year's 16,000. No doubt about it, following the fall of E3 last year, the Game Developers Conference is the biggest industry-only event in the games calendar.

As an event that champions the sharing of knowledge, with as many discussions about industry direction as the use of technology, this is a strong sign for the sector, proving the power really has moved from the sales and marketing arena to the creative and technical masses.

And with some speculating that attendance for GDC08 may really be closer to an unofficial 20,000 – given the increased focus of the press, and a range of associated by not officially-related showcases and pitches taking place in the hotels around San Francisco's Moscone Convention – there's no better event to spur thoughts about the state of play for the industry when it comes to crowd sizes. Especially when so many of the decision makers and the hardest workers are all under one roof, either visiting the expo or attending packed keynotes from speakers as traditional as Microsoft and as diverse as futurist Ray Kurzweil.

Last year, the growing masses of attendees seemed to tie well with the big themes of user-generated content as advocated by Sony and the more personal touch of Nintendo's Wii – with everyone advocating that more power be given the players. For 2008, the even higher number of attendees neatly tied in with another topic a number of speakers and execs *Develop* spoke with returned to, whether intentional or not – that of the uneasy pull of specialists versus generalists amongst the industry's growing team sizes.

And despite the scale of the Game Developers Conference, it seemed clear to me that the industry is still ill at ease with the growing scale supposedly required for to make a hit game.

Two contrasting examples best show this. First, there's Bungie: one of the most prolific studios at the show in terms of sessions – its team was hosting nine different lectures across the five days – its new independent spirit is tempered by a desire to not enter the recruitment race blindly, advocating a (relatively) small team over the arms race of staff.

> ***"No doubt about it, GDC has become the biggest industry-only event in the games calendar…"***

During a half-hour chat with Bungie lead engineer Chris Butcher (you can read the full transcript at developmag.com), it became clear to me that the studio, like many others, is keenly trying to balance having specialised workers that indulge the pull and stretch of its ambitious upcoming projects and next-gen engine development, and also try and make sure those same people could also have some 'all-rounder' skills to compliment the ghettoisation of development duties.

"Bungie has always invested heavily in technology – our founders are computer scientists, so we've had a strong focus on engineering," said Butcher. "The interesting thing is that Bungie's creative side has grown and grown as well, and as game development matures we're actually capable now of supporting people who are purely creative or artistic, without having to need them have a technical grounding. Back in 1991 or so, everyone on development team would be considered a technologist in some respect. Now we can have pure artists at the studio who's contribution is purely creative. That means we're being more specialised now."

But he added: "I'm not a massive fan of specialisation myself - Robert Heinlein once said that 'specialisation is for insects'." Instead, specialisation tends to mean "factionalisation, and then the people who are responsible for holding it together have to run around and work much harder". Butcher said Bungie's answer to this frustrating push-and-pull is to be tough on hiring people that integrated well

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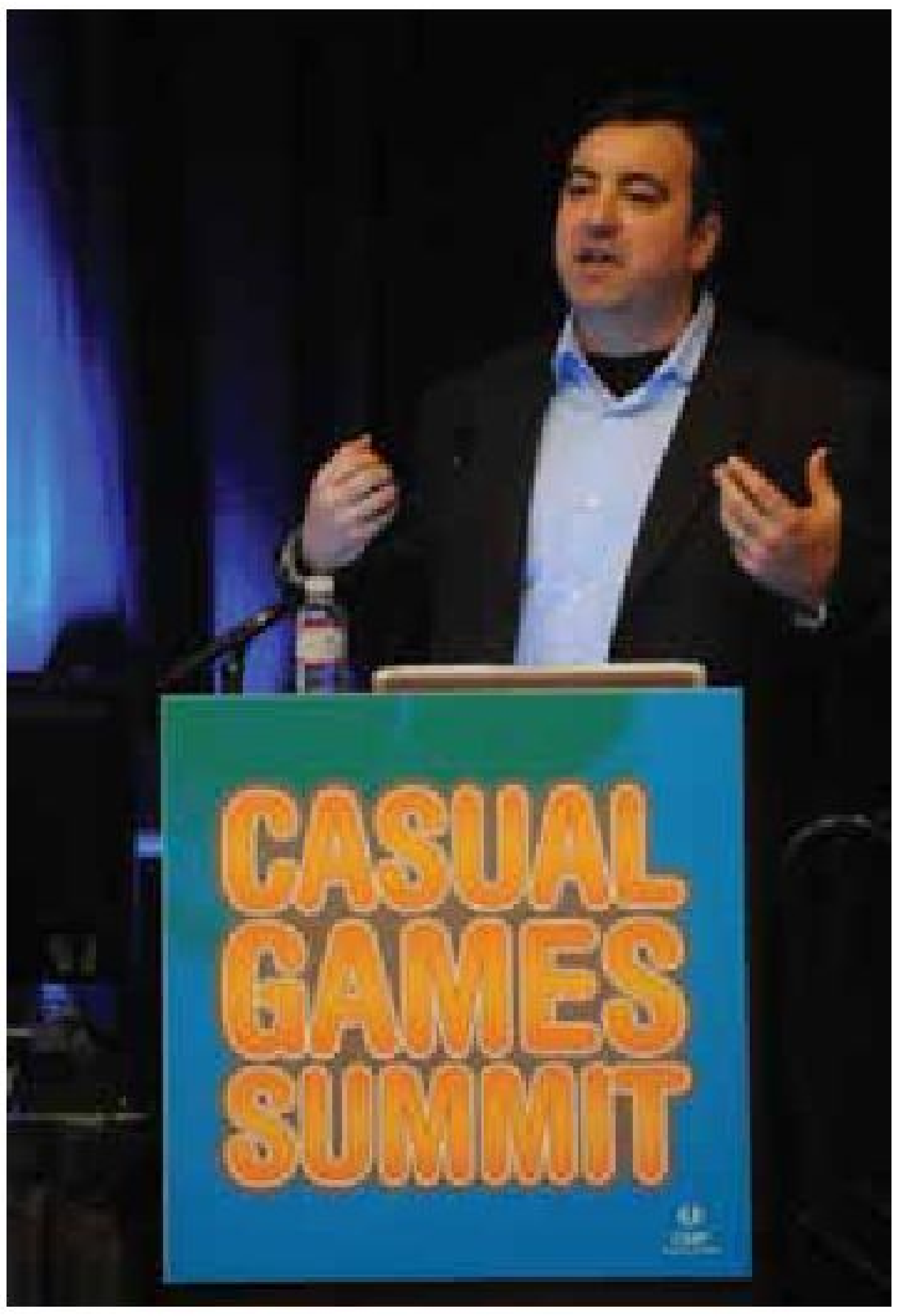

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into a team, above the hive mind insect mentality, even if they only had specialised skills.

EA's Los Angeles team, meanwhile, said it was experiencing this problem too. Led by Louis Castle, a select team at the studio it turns out had been experimenting with indie-style development processes – in essence the antithesis of everything Electronic Arts demands of its production teams – when building Steven Spielberg collaboration *Boom Blox*. His frank session revealed some interesting insight to how something that is the complete opposite of a team like Bungie – that is, a huge multinational with thousands of employees – would try to capture the same creative spirit.

The answer was to rip up the rule book and reject EA's internal game design 'formula', the Game Design Framework – a process all teams are supposed to follow which outlines in detail what projects must be doing at certain points in their production lifecycle and is semi-notorious amongst some in the industry due to its near-daunting thoroughness of "phases, gates and deliverables" and is designed for avoiding inefficient spending. Castle said that the GDF didn't at first seem ideal for small, inexpensive games – as Spielberg's first game was intended to be – so the small team chose to split away, working more like indie developers.

"We broke nearly every rule in the GDF process," Castle explained, adding that contract programmers were hired from outside EA to support the weeks of brainstorming and iterative designing the small core team and Spielberg were conducting early on.

But, he added: "We found it very difficult to find generalists. Our entire business is moving towards specialists." Plus the generalist core team that was in place eventually became discriminating.

"Once the project grew and we started adding staff it started becoming very difficult to bring people up to speed," said Castle, as the iterative process was off-putting to newcomers given that rejecting the GDF and going for fast prototyping meant the team had "not a scrap of documentation" to back up months of pre-production.

Ultimately, Castle said that as the project hit its peak, the team had to embrace the structured Game Design Framework to manage *Boom Blox* towards completion – the "value of specialists" he said meant the game saw great progress on its visual design, "more production capacity, better quality of work, fewer choke points and less stress on core resources".

The general mood of smaller teams vying against the pull of the industry echoed around other sessions – from Splash Damage's retrospective on the steady, focused success of its own team through to the casual games keynote by PlayFirst CEO John Welch, which predicted that the entrance of big publishers into a space dominated by lighter, agile teams would be carnage, as larger companies steamroller bigger ones by virtue of their size, not their creativity.

Unfortunately, there was no easy answer to the matter of big versus small or specialised staff versus all-rounders to find on the show floor, not amongst the sessions nor at the expo (there's still no middleware that will plug that lead programmer gap in your team, natch). But the very fact that high-profile names were airing their views and experiences proved that developers are unhappy with being told that they keep having to invest big, and like the idea of investing smaller and smarter.

Although it was PlayFirst's Welch who posed a provocative question about this point at the end of his keynote. Namely, that while traditional games industry has gotten so big, the real innovations in the key areas like online have been from upstarts like YouTube and Facebook which started private and small before exploding into popularity; does the modern games industry, populated by multinationals and corporations, have that kind of attitude in its blood?

Castle and Butcher's struggles would suggest both yes and no. But the thousands of individuals on ground at GDC, from the Independent Games Festival entrants to the coders and artists propping up the back row at the busiest session, each with their own ideas and views, should hopefully suggest that the industry can maintain the personal touch as it grows. Here's hoping the masses can prove Welch wrong.

THE DEALS

INTEL OFFSETS GAIN
Intel has acquired Offset Software, the creators of the Offset Engine. The company is currently using the engine for its own project (the surprisingly titled *Project Offset*) and has one other licensee, Red 5 Studios.
www.projectoffset.com

STARBREEZE PARTNERS
EA Partners and Starbreeze are teaming up to reinvent one of the publisher's classic franchises. Codenamed *Project RedLime*, the title is headed for PC, PS3 and Xbox 360, and details are said to be forthcoming shortly.
www.starbreeze.com

POPSNAP
PopCap's casual games will soon be gracing Nokia's SNAP multiplayer games service. The first title to launch will be *Chuzzle*, which will feature community elements such as chat and leader boards as well as multiplayer functionality.
www.popcap.com

STAINLESS MAGIC
Xbox Live Arcade specialist Stainless Games is teaming up with Wizards of the Coast to produce a *Magic: The Gathering* game for XBLA and PC. American developer Mind Control has also been signed up to produce a title for PC and Mac.
www.stainlessgames.com

GEARBOX MOTION
Gearbox is the latest studio to adopt NaturalMotion's morpheme animation technology. "Gone are the days of building countless transition and tweening animations," said Gearbox's director of animation David Carter.
www.gearboxsoftware.com

MONUMENTAL GNIUS
Nottingham-based MMO middleware developer Monumental has announced a partnership with Global NetOptiplex to provide server hosting and deployment for online titles developed with the Monumental Technology Suite.
www.monumentalgames.com

GAMEBRY-LATINO
Portugese developer Biodroid will be using Emergent's Gamebryo engine for a Wii title based on popular South American brand *Chiquititas*
biodroid-entertainment.com

DEVELOPER CHART

MARCH 2008

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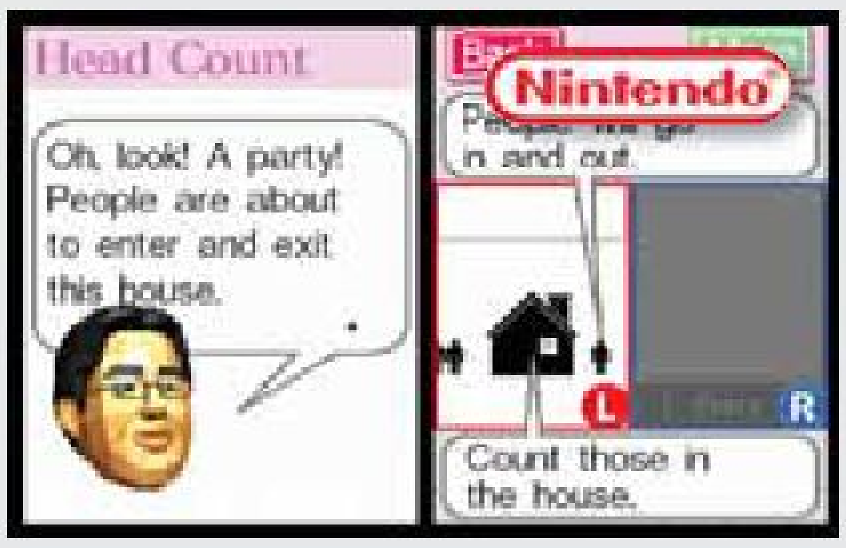
LAST MONTH 1

NINTENDO



Head Count

Oh, look! A party! People are about to enter and exit this house.

People will go in and out.

Count those in the house.

BEST SELLING GAME:
Dr Kawashima's Brain Training

Another chart, another number one spot occupied by Japan's newly people-embracing supercorp. With Dr. Kawashima still the top star in Nintendo's sales ranking, it's a surprise that the brainiac hasn't been brought back for the surely-inevitable *More and More Brain Training*.

DS

2

LAST MONTH 2

EA CANADA

BEST SELLING GAME:
FIFA 08

Clearly football fever is far from over, given that *FIFA 08* is still storming the charts four months after release. EA Canada is no doubt already shin-deep in this year's iteration, but we're hoping there's still time for the 'playing away' minigame complete with Girls Aloud's *No, No, No* on soundtrack duty.

PS2, PS3, PSP, 360, WII, PC

3

LAST MONTH 3

INFINITY WARD

BEST SELLING GAME:
Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

"War War War! How do you like it? How do you like it?," once sang Rachel Stevens. We think. But the public's response would no doubt be "really quite a lot," as Infinity Ward's modern-day continuation of the *Call of Duty* series is still keeping the studio at third place in our chart.

360, PS3, PC

4

LAST MONTH 4

UBISOFT (MONTREAL)

BEST SELLING GAME:
Assassin's Creed

The Crusades era might not have seemed like the best setting for a stealth stab-em-up, but Ubisoft Montreal's skillful addition of a healthy dose of futuristic overtones and a popular dollop of Kristen Bell seems to have really captured gamers' imaginations.

360, PS3

5

LAST MONTH 5

SEGA

BEST SELLING GAME:
Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games

A hedgehog named for his supersonic speeds and a fat plumber whose best form of attack is to sit on things – not the most fairly matched of competitors it would appear, but a rich seam of IP too delicious to pass up whether a developer or, seemingly, just a consumer.

WII

OUR MONTHLY RANKING OF THE WORLD'S STUDIOS BASED ON UK GAMES SALES

CHART KEY	↑ UP
NEW NEW ENTRY	↓ DOWN
▨ INDEPENDENT	↔ NO MOVE

6	↑	LAST MONTH 9	**Maxis**	The Sims 2: Castaway	DS, PS2, PSP, WII	🇺🇸
7	NEW	LAST MONTH -	**Criterion**	Burnout Paradise	360, PS3	🇬🇧
8	↔	LAST MONTH 8	**Konami**	Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	PS2, 360, PS3, PC	🇯🇵
9	↑	LAST MONTH 11	**Traveller's Tales**	Lego Star Wars: Complete Saga	WII, DS, 360, PS3	🇬🇧
10	↓	LAST MONTH 6	**Yuke's**	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2008	PS2, PS3, 360, WII, PSP, DS	🇯🇵
11	↓	LAST MONTH 7	**Rebellion**	The Simpsons Game	PS2, WII, PSP	🇬🇧
12	↑	LAST MONTH 13	**Amaze Entertainment**	The Simpsons Game	DS	🇺🇸
13	↑	LAST MONTH 15	**EA Redwood Shores**	MySims	DS, WII	🇺🇸
14	↑	LAST MONTH 19	**Capcom**	Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles	WII	🇯🇵
15	↓	LAST MONTH 16	**Neversoft**	Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock	360, PS3, WII	🇺🇸
16	↓	LAST MONTH 10	**A2M**	High School Musical: Sing It!	PS2, WII	🇨🇦
17	↔	LAST MONTH 17	**Ubisoft (France)**	Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	WII, DS	🇫🇷
18	↓	LAST MONTH 24	**Intelligent Systems**	Wario Ware: Smooth Moves	WII	🇯🇵
19	↓	LAST MONTH 14	**IO Interactive**	Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	360, PS3, PC	🇩🇰
20	↑	LAST MONTH 27	**EA LA**	Medal of Honor: Airborne	PS3, 360, PC	🇺🇸

Chart Comment

Gone are the days when we could exclaim surprise at Nintendo's number one position in our developer chart, but rest assured: the days when we can open with lack of surprise at Nintendo's number one position in our developer chart are definitely showing no signs of abating.

Nevertheless, there is surprise in store for those people who say that it's only Nintendo's first party software that sells on its platforms: while their chunk of the market is indeed impressive, the DS sales data suggests that Nintendo's share is barely a quarter, leaving three quarters up for grabs by third parties. Impressive, yes, but not nearly a proportion large enough to validate some claims.

It's not just Nintendo that retains its spot, though – in fact, all of our top five remain unchanged from last month, attesting to the continued popularity of titles such as *Assassin's Creed, Call of Duty 4* and *FIFA 08*, all of which were shifting impressive amounts even last year.

That, or it's down to the post-Christmas lull – the industry's equivalent of that slothful sofa sprawl after the big turkey feast – which is evidenced by this month's only new entry being Criterion with its slightly tardy *Burnout Paradise*. Still, it's driven the EA studio to a respectable seventh position despite only being on sale for six days of the month and, while we're not usually ones for predictions, it's a fairly safe bet that next month will see Criterion performing even better as the title enjoys more shelf time.

> ***"There's surprise in store for those who say that it's only Nintendo's first party software that sells on its platforms..."***

Traveller's Tales once again proves to be one of the best-faring UK studios in our chart, still riding high on the success of its *Lego Star Wars* compendium – and with super-licences *Lego Batman, Lego Indiana Jones* and *Prince Caspian* all set to roll out in the future, their's is a face we're likely to see as much of this year as we did last.

Ed Fear
ed.fear@intentmedia.co.uk

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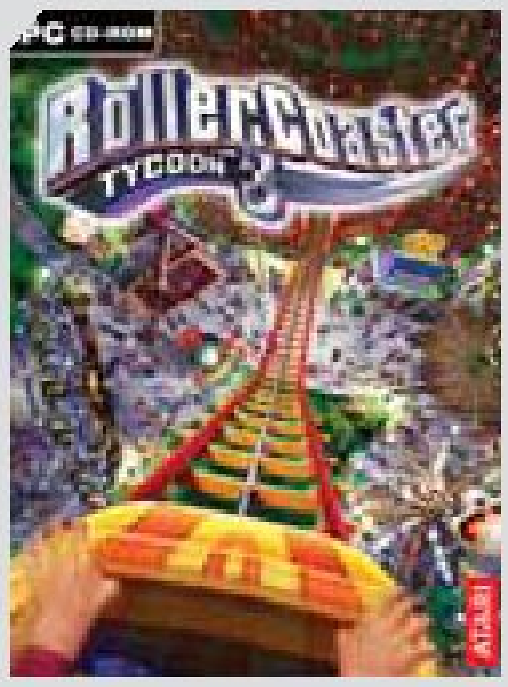
GREATBRITISHGAMES

RollerCoaster Tycoon

In the second of our exclusive profiles of UK-made games IPs, **Nick Gibson** looks at RollerCoaster Tycoon…

Roller Coaster 1
Beta1 (Europe) 05/12/2002
RollerCoaster Tycoon
Beta1 (Europe) 05/12/2002

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON



NUMBER OF ITERATIONS: Three games, six expansion packs and six re-releases/compilations

ESTIMATED TOTAL UNIT SALES: Nine million+

TIMELINE:
1994: *Transport Tycoon*
1995: *Transport Tycoon Deluxe*
1999: *RollerCoaster Tycoon*
2002: *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2*
2004: *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*

OWNERSHIP HISTORY

1999: *RollerCoaster Tycoon* released by Hasbro Interactive who had taken on the publishing rights originally signed by Chris Sawyer to MicroProse.

2001: *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* publishing rights transferred to Infogrames following its acquisition of Hasbro Interactive. These rights were subsequently transferred to Atari Inc, a majority-owned US-based subsidiary of Infogrames.

2004: *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* published by Atari, having been developed by Frontier Developments

2005: Chris Sawyer initiates legal action against Atari, claiming $4.8m in unpaid royalties. Atari files counterclaim in 2006 alleging royalty overpayment and inducement to breach of contract. The parties settle out of court in 2008.

Creator: Chris Sawyer

Games programmer and designer Chris Sawyer had been operating in the games industry working on numerous games projects for other designers and development companies for 11 years before releasing his first title. That game, *Transport Tycoon*, placed players in the position of the owner of a newly-incorporated transport company, and was clearly inspired by US designer Sid Meier's *Railroad Tycoon* (published by the same publisher, Microprose, in 1990 but otherwise unrelated) which itself shared many gameplay similarities with *SimCity*, released in 1989.

Like many games of the time, *Transport Tycoon* was the creation of a lone developer, Chris Sawyer. Its commercial success, combined with a new-found passion for rollercoasters, lead Sawyer to focus his next title: originally intended as the sequel to *Transport Tycoon*, it became a business simulation of rollercoaster theme parks, and thus *RollerCoaster Tycoon* was born.

RollerCoaster Tycoon hit shelves in 1999 and, uniquely for its time, was developed almost entirely by Sawyer with the assistance of a single artist and composer. It was also unique in being written in low-level assembly language rather than C, a development practice long-since considered obsolete at the time. As a result, the game was reported to have taken over four years to create.

The *RollerCoaster Tycoon* games give players the role of creating and managing a theme park based around rollercoasters. Players not only design the coasters but also many other features ▶

of the theme park, all of which impacts the ongoing popularity of the park and the revenue it generates. This, in turn, influences the flow of capital available for the player to invest in maintaining, improving and expanding the park.

RollerCoaster Tycoon, like many of the preceding economic simulation games, adopted a sales curve that was unlike traditional computer and video games: featuring a long tail sales profile, the vast majority of the game's sales took place after the first three months on the shelves, and a significant proportion of the title's sales were achieved at or around a budget price point.

COMPANY INCEPTION AND GROWTH

Unlike the other lone designer-developers in the UK who had created games in the 1980s and early 1990s, Chris Sawyer never saw the need to incorporate his efforts into a specific company. The IP rights to all the games he has designed, including *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, reside exclusively with him as an individual to this day.

The publishing rights to the *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series, on the other hand, have followed a less clear-cut path. Sawyer originally signed the publishing rights to the first title in the *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series to MicroProse, a UK-based publisher who had handled his *Transport Tycoon* series. It appears that he assigned the publishing right of first refusal (or some other similar sequel rights) to MicroProse as the publishing responsibilities for the three *RollerCoaster Tycoon* titles and their six expansion packs ended up in the hands of four different publishing companies.

In 1998, a year prior to the first *RollerCoaster Tycoon*'s release, MicroProse was acquired by Hasbro Interactive. Hasbro was itself then acquired by French publisher Infogrames in 2001 and was subsequently rolled into its US division. Infogrames then spun-out and renamed Atari (in which Infogrames continues to retain a majority holding). Atari published both sequels to the original *RollerCoaster Tycoon* title.

The relationship between Atari and Chris Sawyer seems to have soured some time after the release of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2*. His involvement in the third game was restricted to design consultant, although he had clearly had a hand in choosing its developer, long-time collaborator David Braben's Frontier Developments.

In 2005, details came to light about litigation initiated by Chris Sawyer in the UK against Atari following an independent audit in 2003 of sales and royalties generated by the *RollerCoaster Tycoon* titles. The court statements revealed that the series had achieved over nine million unit sales and grossed over $180 million. Chris Sawyer had, at that point, received some $30 million in royalties but believed that he was still due $4.8 million in unpaid royalties.

Atari filed a counterclaim in 2006 alleging that it had actually overpaid Chris Sawyer $1.6 million in royalties (dismissed in 2007) and that he had also induced a breach of contract in his dealings with Frontier Developments. The dispute raged for nearly three years before being finally settled, out of court, in January 2008 – the details of which have yet to be made public.

> ***"RollerCoaster Tycoon is arguably the most improbable success story involving UK IP…"***

ANALYSIS

RollerCoaster Tycoon is arguably the most improbable success story involving UK games IP in that it defied both established development and publishing practices but also the perceived industry wisdom at the time about how AAA titles are created. As a one-man development project, the original title took an inordinately long time to reach the market, featured extremely simplistic graphics at a time when high quality graphics were considered a necessity for PC sales success, and was based around a subject that had never been explored as the sole gameplay focus of any previous game. It would probably have been seen as being a marketing department's nightmare prior to its release.

However, the upside was that this approach also allowed the game to be created for a fraction of the cost of most other AAA PC titles and allowed the title to cater for a PC specification significantly below that of other PC titles, enabling the broadest addressable market.

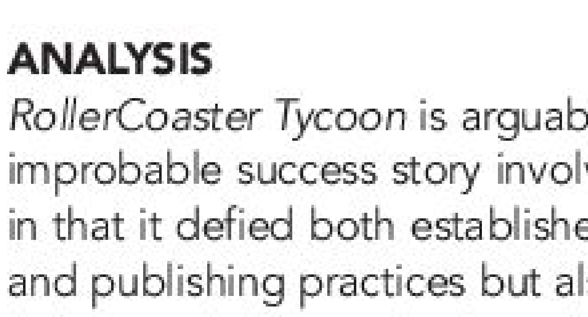
Although it did not originate the "Tycoon" entrepreneurial simulation genre, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* established a formula to take it out of a niche market and apply it to a mass market audience. Its success has since spawned over a dozen derivative titles, all applying the same type of gameplay to different scenarios in an attempt to access the same consumer base that Sawyer unearthed. Ironically, although almost all of them were created by sizeable development teams, only a few (such as Microsoft's *Zoo Tycoon* series) have gone on to achieve any notable success.

If the court documents filed by Chris Sawyer are correct, the franchise's success has been phenomenal and, given its background, should be considered a unique achievement. Interestingly, the two *RollerCoaster Tycoon* titles which Chris Sawyer directly worked on achieved the vast majority of the total sales generated to date, a reported seven million of the nine million sold by mid 2005. The third title was produced with considerably higher production values but with little or no input from Sawyer, and it appears to have achieved a much more limited commercial success.

RollerCoaster Tycoon demonstrated the disproportionately large impact one inspired and creative game maker can have on an industry. It also exemplifies, however rarely, the power of strong independently-owned IP to emerge intact from an industry mired in multi-million pound development budgets, hundred-strong development teams and the hype of the latest technology. We believe that, most importantly, its defiance of accepted industry logic demonstrates the potential rewards for developers that challenge development and publishing norms and innovate.

CONCLUSIONS

- The game had mass appeal due to its subject matter, gameplay and family-friendly content.
- The intuitive interface and easy learning curve attracted non games players.
- The patient commitment of its original publisher (Hasbro Interactive) aided the development of the first title's long tail sales curve.
- The budget/mid-market pricing (average of $20 per unit sold over lifetime of series) kept the game accessible to a wider market.
- The availability at, and promotion within, mass-market retail stores such as Wal Mart and Best Buy helped deliver protracted, strong sales.



Games Investor Consulting is a specialist games industry consultancy founded in 2003 to provide independent games research and corporate finance consulting to the games industry and financial community. Headed by Rick Gibson and Nick Gibson, GIC is one of the industry's most trusted sources for market intelligence, has generated a number of industry-standard reports and has consulted on games strategy and research for numerous games and media companies as well as trade and governmental bodies.

deve

INDUSTRY EXCEL

Categories

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Best New IP
Best Use of a Licence
Visual Arts
Audio Accomplishment
Publishing Hero

TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES
Tools Provider
Technical Innovation
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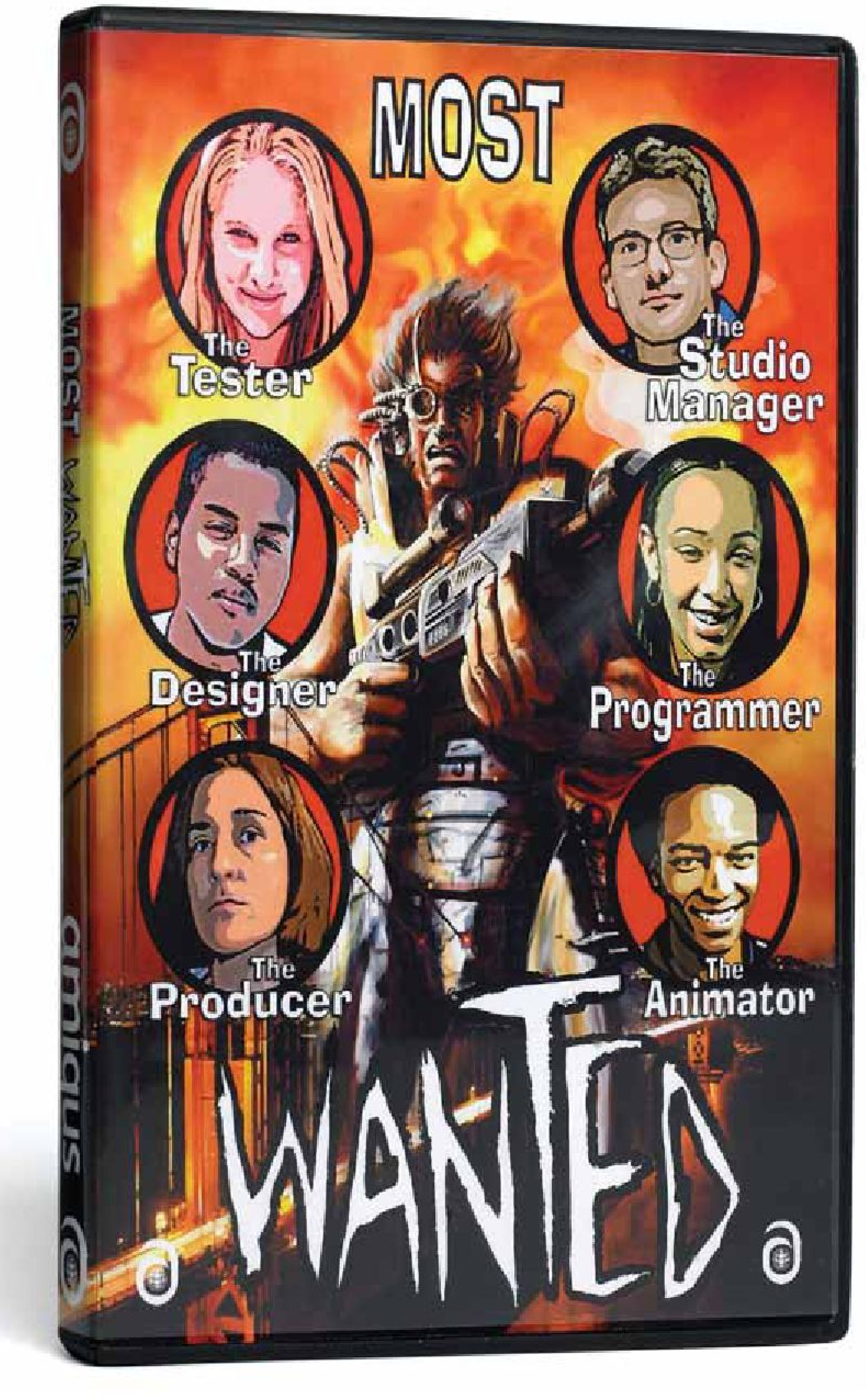
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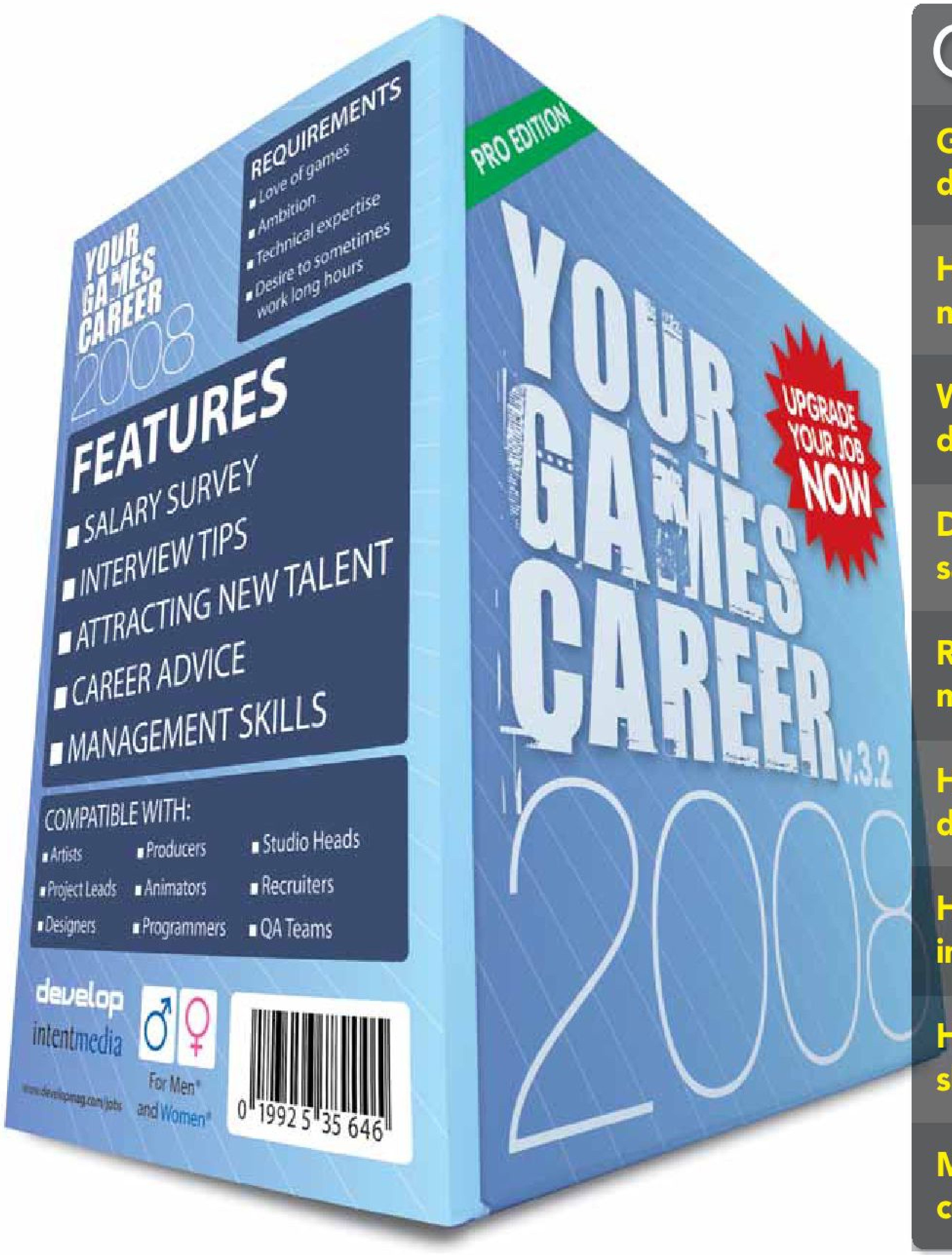
OUR IN-DEPTH GUIDE TO LEVELLING UP YOUR VIDEO GAMES INDUSTRY CAREER. AND ALL THE LATEST JOBS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Recruitment market analysis p42

Hiring female developers p44

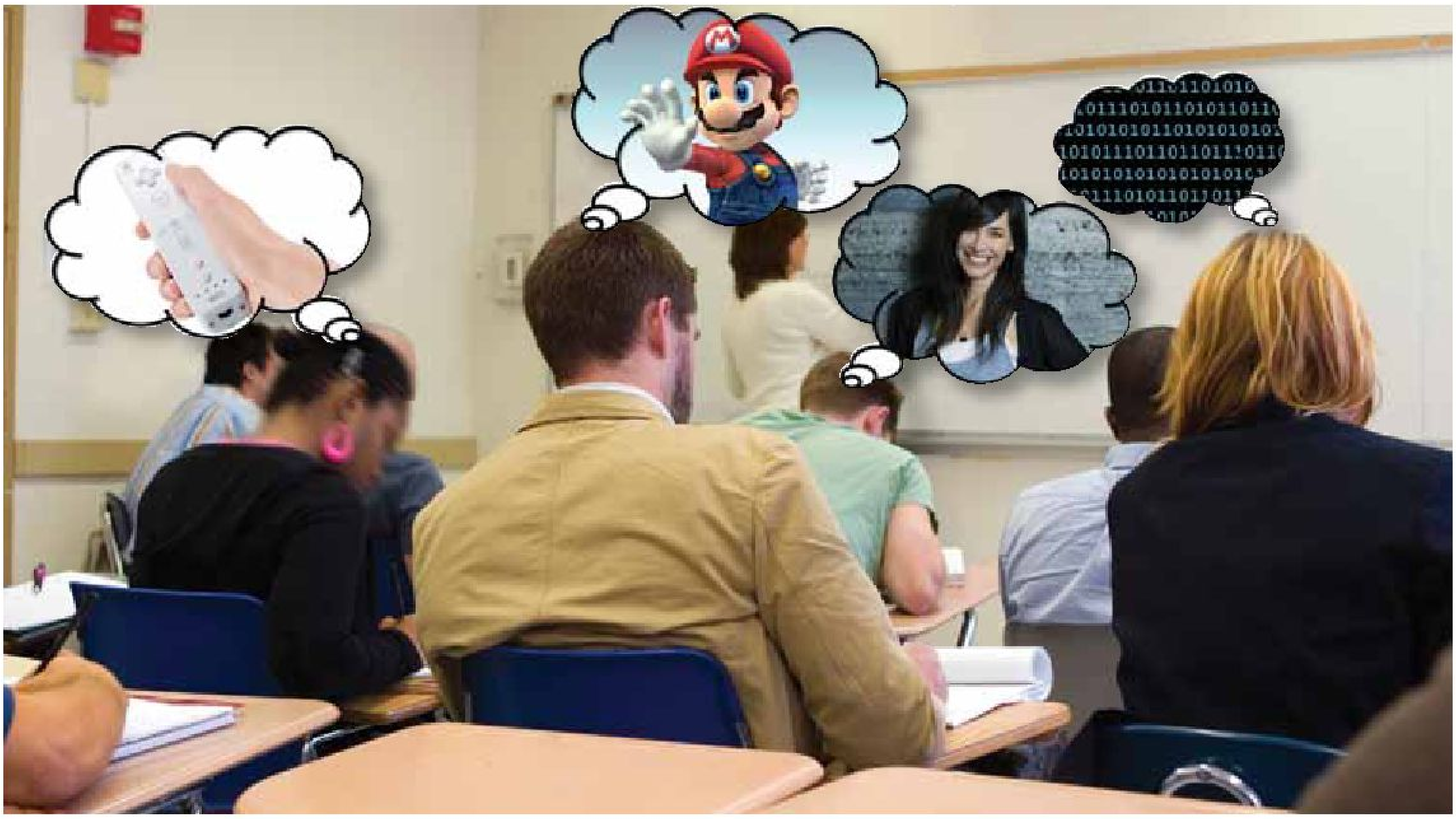
How to ace an interview p47

Helping raise skill levels p48

Managing multi-cultural teams p51

Get your head

Our special run of articles begins with a guide for beginners. Do you a move into the games industry, but don't know where to start? **Ed Fear** takes a look at what you can do right now...



If you're looking for a job in the games industry, there's little better way to sell yourself than having an impressive demo reel. With demands increasing on studios, and the often-mentioned 'recruitment crisis', recruiters don't want to know what you think you can do – they want to see it.

It's the sort of thing that a games degree course will steer you towards, shepherding you out of the door with a portfolio geared towards whipping up HR departments into a frenzy. But for most people, the realisation of what you want to do doesn't come as conveniently close to university application-time as that. Maybe they're younger, looking for things they can be doing in the meantime, or maybe they're already in the workplace and eyeing a career change.

We've taken a look at the best resources for helping you get on your way to a career in games. From basic code-less game creation to engine modding, events to resources, we've rounded up the things we think might just help get that career kick-started.

WHERE TO START

To get you started, there's plenty of readinng material on the web and in print to start firing up your creative engines…

Developmag.com

OK, sure, it's our site: but there's little better way of keeping in touch with all the goings on in the industry. After all, it's only through watching their movements that you can find the right studio for you, and keep up to date on the all the important industry and technology news. Plus our growing list of tutorials can aid your learning.

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The Game Maker's Apprentice

Price: £27.99; ISBN: 1590596153

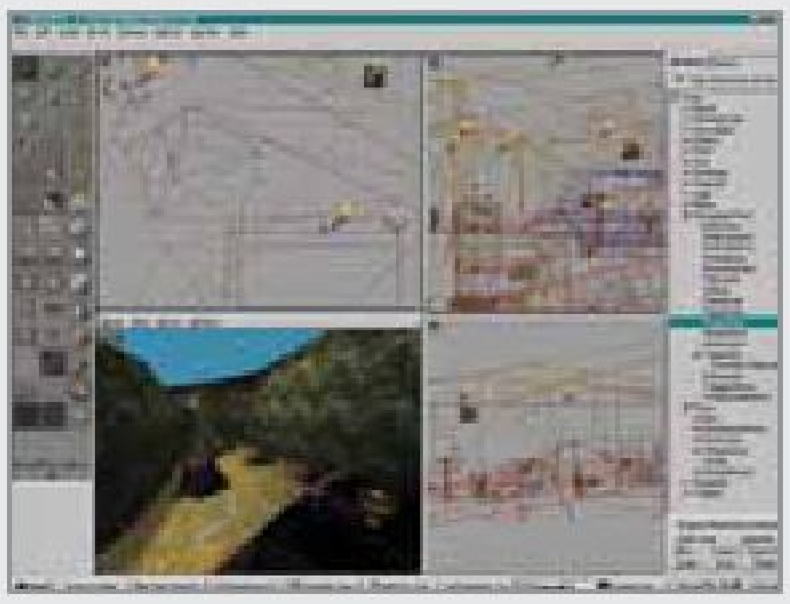
Game Maker is a popular game creation tool for complete beginners, requiring no programming knowledge nor previous knowledge of game development. It's been used to teach game design to teenagers, and this book is the official guide, taking the reader from the basics through to multiplayer game design and even artificial intelligence. It's a decent primer to the basics of game design, without having you having much about code.

The Game Maker's Apprentice
Game Development for Beginners

in the game

MOD, DESIGN, CODE

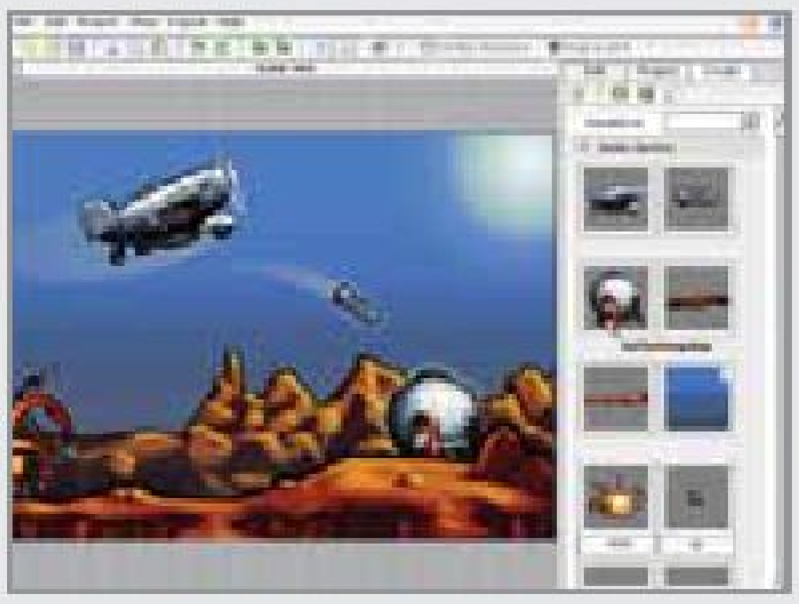
Read up on the industry but want to now learn more? These introductory game building and modding tools are a good place to start…



Unreal Engine 2/3
Price: From £5 to £35

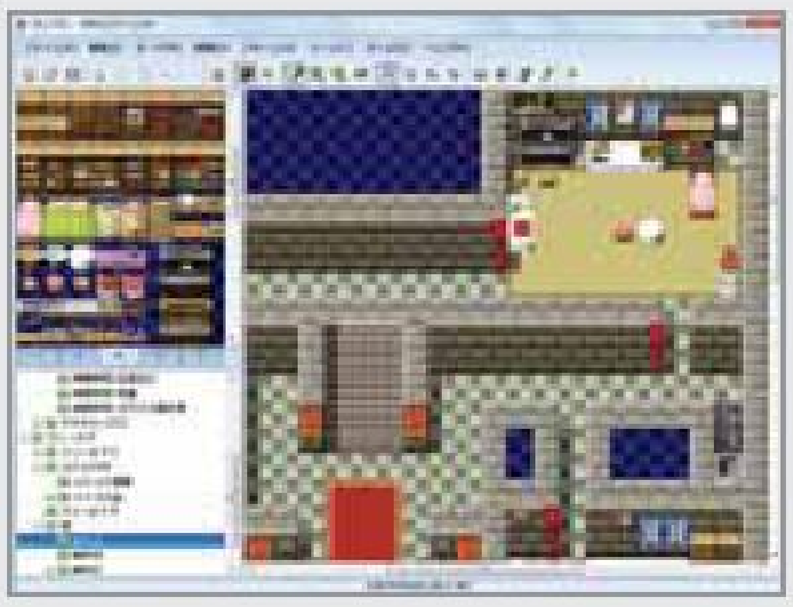
When it comes to an engine that it's useful to know, given the current state of the middleware engine market it's hard to recommend anything other than Epic's Unreal Engine. And, luckily, it costs almost nothing to do so – all you'll need is a copy of *Unreal Tournament 2004* for Unreal Engine 2 modding or mega-PC owners can grab *Unreal Tournament 3* for UE3 abilities. All disciplines are catered for: programmers can get to grips with UnrealScript, level designers can learn UnrealEd and artists can learn the UE pipeline and stage cutscenes with the Matinee cutscene creator.

Not only will you have an impressive demo, but real skills valuable at any of the countless studios using Epic's popular engine.



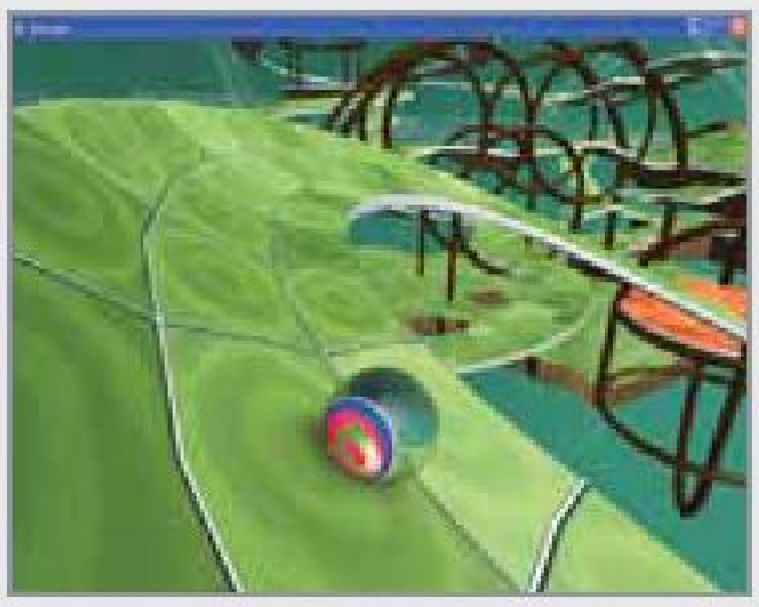
Torque Game Builder
Price: Around £50
www.garagegames.com

GarageGames' mission statement is to provide hobbyist and independent developers with top-class technology at a low price, and their entry-level 2D game creation suite Torque Game Builder is a perfect example. It runs on the proprietary language TorqueScript, which may be an annoyance to those who would rather put one of their already-known languages into practice, but the massive feature set – including a particle editor, physics engine and support for both Mac and Windows – and powerful editor more than make up for any inconvenience. Those wanting to make use of XNA and C# should check out the similarly-priced TorqueX engine.



RPG Maker VX
Price: Around £50
www.rpgmaker-vx.com

Want to make a game but don't want to worry about learning to program? RPG Maker VX is a great tool that'll give you experience in structuring, mapping and writing games without having to write a single line of code. All aspects of RPG development, from cutscenes and conversations to commerce, can be done easily through a comprehensive editor. A standard battle system is provided, but all aspects of the game can be completely customised should users want to go the extra mile and tinker with the engine's Ruby source code. As such, the tool appeals to both novice and power-users, and a huge community has built up around the series for resource and knowledge sharing.

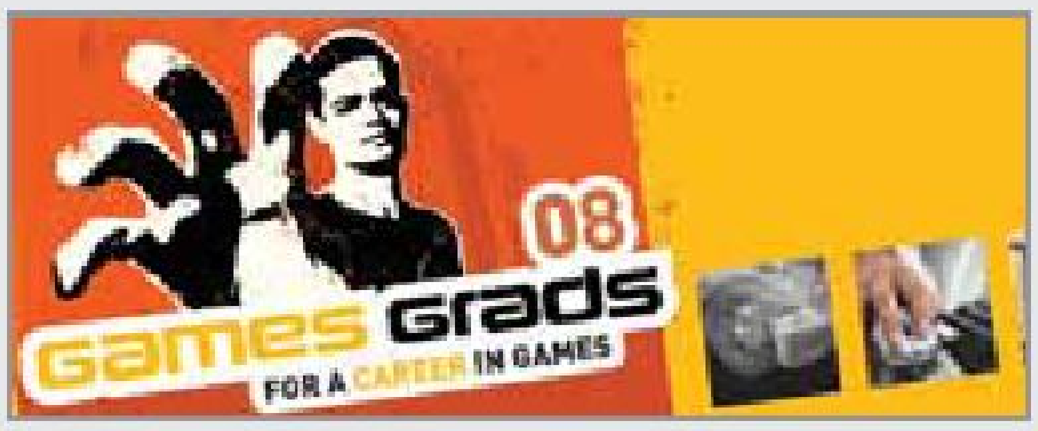


XNA Game Studio 2.0
Price: Free (£65 per year for Xbox support)
creators.xna.com

Sure, developing games on the PC is pretty cool, but there's little to beat the wow-factor of making something that you can run on a console. Microsoft's framework, which simplifies the game coding process by providing all the common foundation code that everyone ends up writing again and again, also gives coders the ability to code for both PC and Xbox 360, even supporting Xbox Live and Games for Windows Live. The possibilities are massive, and Microsoft 's hard work to foster a community around the tech has reaped the rewards of countless portals, tutorials and books available for all experience levels.

EVENTS

So you've learnt what a game developer does – now get out there and meet the industry…


08
GamesGrads
FOR A CAREER IN GAMES

GamesGrads
London: April 24th, 2008
Manchester: April 29th, 2008
www.gamesgrads.co.uk

If you want to get your foot in the industry, many would say that the best way to do so is to get in front of developers and impress the hell out of them. Which makes something like GamesGrads, where companies such as Lionhead, Black Rock, Rebellion and Sega pitch up their stalls to talk to wannabe game developers, totally essential. Add in the seminar programme full of advice for budding game designers and it's clear that GamesGrads is not to be missed for anyone wanting to join the industry.

Studio Open Days

If you want a look inside a real, functioning games studio then there's no better opportunity than to visit one during an open days.

Leamington Spa-based Blitz was the first to try this approach – by the time you read this, its March events will have already taken place, but more dates are undoubtedly set to be confirmed soon.

The studio has now run three open day sessions for students and lecturers, all of them running out of space. Hopefuls are required to fill out an application form and submit a work sample to wow the studio and secure a place.

Visitors are not only given a tour of the facility, but also practical information about the disciplines involved in making games – from 2D and 3D art to programming, production and everything in between – and a chance to talk to senior Blitz staff about work, your areas of interest and advice for breaking in to the industry.

The idea has caught on amongst other studios, too. Cambridge-based Frontier has recently entered into the education outreach world, holding an open day split into various disciplines. THQ-owned Juice Games in Warrington also runs open days for final year degree students.

While 2008's days might have already passed for some of the above, we'll keep developmag.com readers up to date with additional dates when the news breaks. You can also check out each studio's dedicated open day resource site:

www.blitzgames.com/opendays
www.juicegames.com/openday
www.frontier.co.uk/jobs/open_day/

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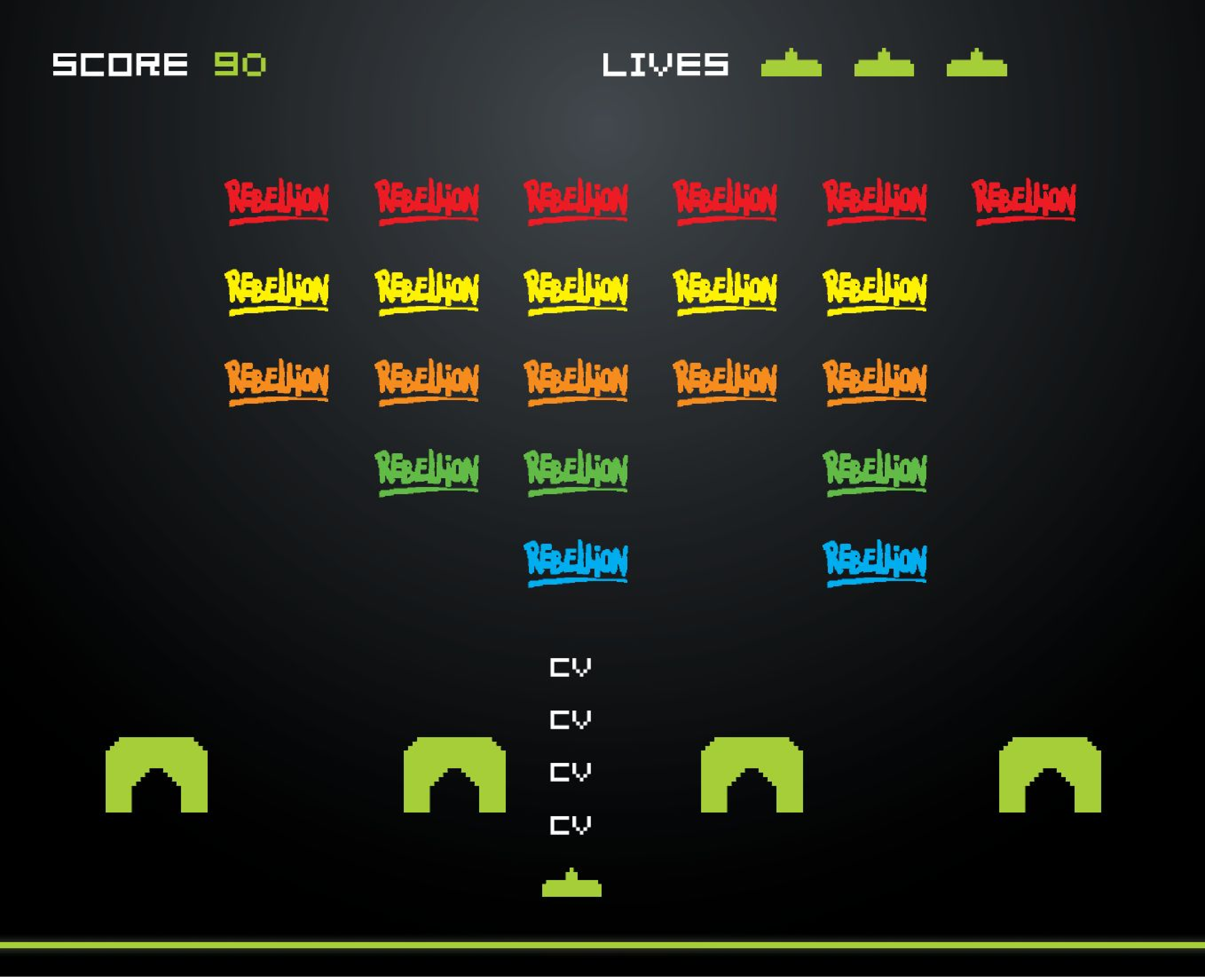

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First scrum, first served

Juice Games' **Paul Keast** explains why scrum is a great way to empower new entrants to the games industry…

So let's get one thing straight from the start: scrum is not a panacea for all known development ills. It doesn't even come close, but it is currently a hot topic in the games industry. It's a relatively new way of structuring and running software developments projects using iterative, incremental practices.

At Juice Games we have recently adopted this way of working and among many of the benefits we have found it to be a great way for new entrants to the industry to have a much higher degree of involvement in shaping the production of game than was previously possible.

So what exactly is scrum? Named after a set play in rugby where a group of eight players work together to move the ball up field, it's a project management framework which is part of the school of agile project management methodologies. There is a manifesto for agile software development, available to view at agilemanifesto.org, on which all agile methodologies are based, including scrum. This manifesto contains four main rules: to place more value on people over processes; working software over comprehensive documentation; customer collaboration over contract negotiation; and responding to changes over following a plan.

The idea of scrum in simple terms is that a large development team is split into smaller cross-disciplinary teams, with each of these teams working in cycles of up to 30 days, each time creating a working slice of the game.

These teams consist of between five to nine people and contain a cross-section of talent such as artists, programmers, designers and QA testers. It's very important that each team is an independent unit, capable of creating game features without relying on people from outside of the team.

THE SPRINT

At the start of each 30 day cycle (know as a sprint) each scrum team chooses to tackle as many high priority game features as they feel they can deliver to a high quality within the given sprint length. The team is empowered to implement each agreed feature in the way they see fit.

The key point to note is that the scope of the work is a result of a well-defined, detailed negotiation between all members of the team. So as a member of a Scrum team your opinion is sought on the implementation of every feature. The work is decided upon by each team member voting on an estimate on the complexity of delivering each feature.

Every team member is involved in this estimation process. If some people in the team don't fully understand the issues around developing these features, these issues are discussed further which helps promotes better knowledge sharing. The simple fact that the amount of features is agreed on by the team member also goes a long way to reducing or even eliminating any crunch periods. Once the list of features a team will be delivering is agreed on, no one is allowed to alter the scope of the work during the sprint and therefore dangerous feature creep is eliminated.

At the end of each sprint, the team delivers the product and demonstrates the implemented features. At this stage, the requirements of the project can change. For example if one feature turned out to be amazingly fun, more emphasis could be placed on it than originally envisaged. Conversely if a feature doesn't live up to expectations it could be reduced or even completely removed.

It's an enormously powerful tool in game production to be able to test and evaluate gameplay at a much earlier stage in the development cycle and to be not afraid to make changes where required. Having a system that allows and in fact positively encourages feedback is invaluable.

> ***"It's important that each team is an independent unit…"***

In our experience we have found scrum to have excellent benefits as a mechanism for training and empowering new entrants to the industry. With such large teams required for next-gen console development, with more traditional methods it can sometimes be difficult for a junior staff member to feel they are making an impact or understand how the work they are doing affects the title as a whole.

Working within a much smaller, closely knitted team that is highly empowered, a new entrant will be a lot more involved in important decisions from day one. As people work in a small team with people from different disciplines, each team member will gain a much better understanding of the overall development process as well. For example, programmers will obtain a better understanding of how artists work and vice versa.

Above: A daily scrum meeting at Juice

Scrum also encourages a better support structure when compared to alternate development methodologies. There is a shift in emphasis away from focusing on an individual's performance to focusing more on the team's performance as a whole. Teams pass or fail sprints together, so if an individual hits a problem it's in every team members interest to ensure they have done everything they can do to help resolve the issue.

Scrum and other agile methodologies are changing for the better the way people in the games industry work. There is a greater emphasis on knowledge sharing and in ensuring every member of a team has an understanding of how their work fits into the context of the project as a whole. Not only will new entrants to the industry find they have a greater involvement in shaping the production of a game but they will also learn and progress much quicker than in more traditional development environments.

If you are a graduate looking to break into the industry, you could do worse than hit the ground running by looking at **www.controlchaos.com**

__Paul Keast__ is a project manager at Juice Games based in Warrington near Manchester. Paul has completed several projects in his five years at Juice on wireless and DS platforms. He is currently project managing one of two brand new next-gen IPs Juice has in development

OPINION

by John Sear, University of Derby

Don't say no to games degrees

The games industry doesn't want games degrees. It seems that not a month goes by without a big name in games rubbishing university games courses. We've had EA, Frontier and even Tiga in recent months put the boot in.

To be fair, I think these comments have been taken a little out of context, but the feeling from industry seems overwhelmingly: "We'd rather have the traditional degrees back – we'll recruit from computer science, maths and physics, thank you very much."

Unfortunately, in some respects, it might be a bit late for that. Take a look at the UCAS entry pages – the keyword 'game' brings up 267 courses across 62 universities. Although, of these, none are in the top 20 institutes (Times Higher Good University Guide 2008), and there are just five institutes out of the entire top 40. If we were to average the position of the 62 universities that offer games degrees, we'd end up with a 76th out of 113.

So you can pretty much guarantee if you're a university in the bottom 50 per cent then you'll offer a degree in games.

So perhaps what the industry is really saying is, "We're an elite field, we're used to attracting the best, we don't want to take weak students from lower universities offering poor courses. And, if you're only offering these courses as a way of attracting large student numbers then we don't want anything to do with the bad publicity that is going to blow up in your face when these 267 courses go belly up."

Quite simply, you're going to get a better standard of graduate from a traditional course that delivers core skills from a top twenty university than you're going to get from a games-focused degree from the bottom 50 per cent (sweeping generalisations – I know).

Now, perhaps we need to turn this on its head. What if we could produce a good degree course, perhaps one that does attract strong students, that does teach these traditional skills but has material specifically targeted to the games industry ensuring that our graduates enter the industry ready to make an impact. Would the industry be interested in the students that these degrees turn out?

This is what I and my colleagues believe we have managed at the University of Derby. We are all ex games-industry and felt that games degrees weren't delivering. Most degrees looked to us like a rebadged media or soft-computing degrees put together by academics who didn't understand the games industry, but were under pressure to attract student numbers. While the University of Derby games team are all from traditional university backgrounds, traditional universities are not at the point where they are ready to embrace games degrees.

We've recognised that games are an interesting and motivational tool to teach and engage our students. How else could we point to having labs full of dedicated students putting in 40 to 60 hour weeks (even on top of their part time jobs)?

BUBBLE BURSTS

The games university bubble will burst in the next few years. Clearly industry cannot and will not take these droves of mediocre games graduates. Applicants will quickly work out that there aren't jobs at the end of the games degree road. Presently, the placement rate of the majority of games degrees appears to be below 20 per cent (and that's if we include placement in QA roles). University places are a market-driven economy; the good students will quickly find out which are the best courses and those will survive.

It is still a possibility that with the right high quality graduate output we can grow the UK games industry once again. This is something that we at the University of Derby are working towards (currently we have a games industry placement rate of above 90 per cent). Now is the time for the industry to align itself with the best universities.

> **"The games university bubble will burst in the next few years. Industry cannot and will not take these droves of medicore graduates..."**

So, turn your back on games degrees at your peril. Whether we like it or not they are here to stay, and dare I say that a few are even doing a decent job. The bright, dedicated students with dreams of working in the games industry are signing up to them and they'll be setting the industry alight in a company near you in the very near future.

John Sear is the Programme Leader for the BSc Computer Games Programming degree at the University of Derby. He is frequently engaged in academic/industry relationship building discussions
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codemasters™ studios

SALARY $URV€¥

If you're in the industry and looking to move around, or want to get into the sector, you'll want to know what each job pays. We asked leading agencies OPM, Aardvark Swift and Day One Search – and a number of leading studios – what the salary ranges are for each key role. Here's what they had to say…

Compared to figures we published last year, it seems that games development salaries in the UK have risen in the past 12 months, although not by a massive margin.

That won't come as much of a surprise given that studios heads all over the country are privately grumbling that the UK may well have become the most expensive place on the planet to develop a game, and the pressure is on to balance costs with attracting talents.

Strangely, the salaries for programmers – the field consensus says is still severely undersubscribed – are in disarray. The average salaries for junior roles have fallen, but senior level salaries have risen. Perhaps this has a lot to do with the disparity of talent between newcomers and those with plenty of experience; and maybe studio heads feel that inexperienced talent might not 'know any better', with the pounds shaved off lower salaries added to the pay for senior roles? Some claim that senior developers can earn more programming games than they can writing code for financial institutions in the city, after all.

PRODUCER

Associate producer	£16,500 to £27,000
Producer	£27,500 to £40,000
Senior producer	£37,000 to £55,000
Executive producer	£45,000 to £75,000
Studio head	£60,000 to £85,000

ARTIST

Junior artist/animator	£17,000 to £21,000
Artist/animator	£21,000 to £32,000
Senior artist/animator	£28,000 to £36,500
Lead artist	£36,500 to £49,500
Art director	£45,000 to £60,000+

DESIGNER

Junior designer	£16,000 to £23,500
Senior designer	£27,000 to £35,000
Lead designer	£36,700 to £48,000
Design manager	£45,000 to £70,000

PROGRAMMER

Junior programmer	£18,000 to £24,000
Regular programmer	£21,500 to £33,500
Senior programmer	£32,000 to £48,000
Lead programmer	£37,000 to £55,000
Technical director	£50,000 to £70,000

QA

QA technician (functionality)	£15,000 to £18,000
QA technician (localisation)	£16,000 to £20,000
QA technician (compliance)	£17,000 to £22,000
Senior QA technician	£17,000 to £22,000
Lead QA technician	£18,000 to £22,000
Senior Lead QA Ttechnician	£20,000 to £25,000
QA supervisor/coordinator	£20,000 to £30,000
Assist QA manager	£25,000 to £40,000
QA manager	£35,000 to £50,000

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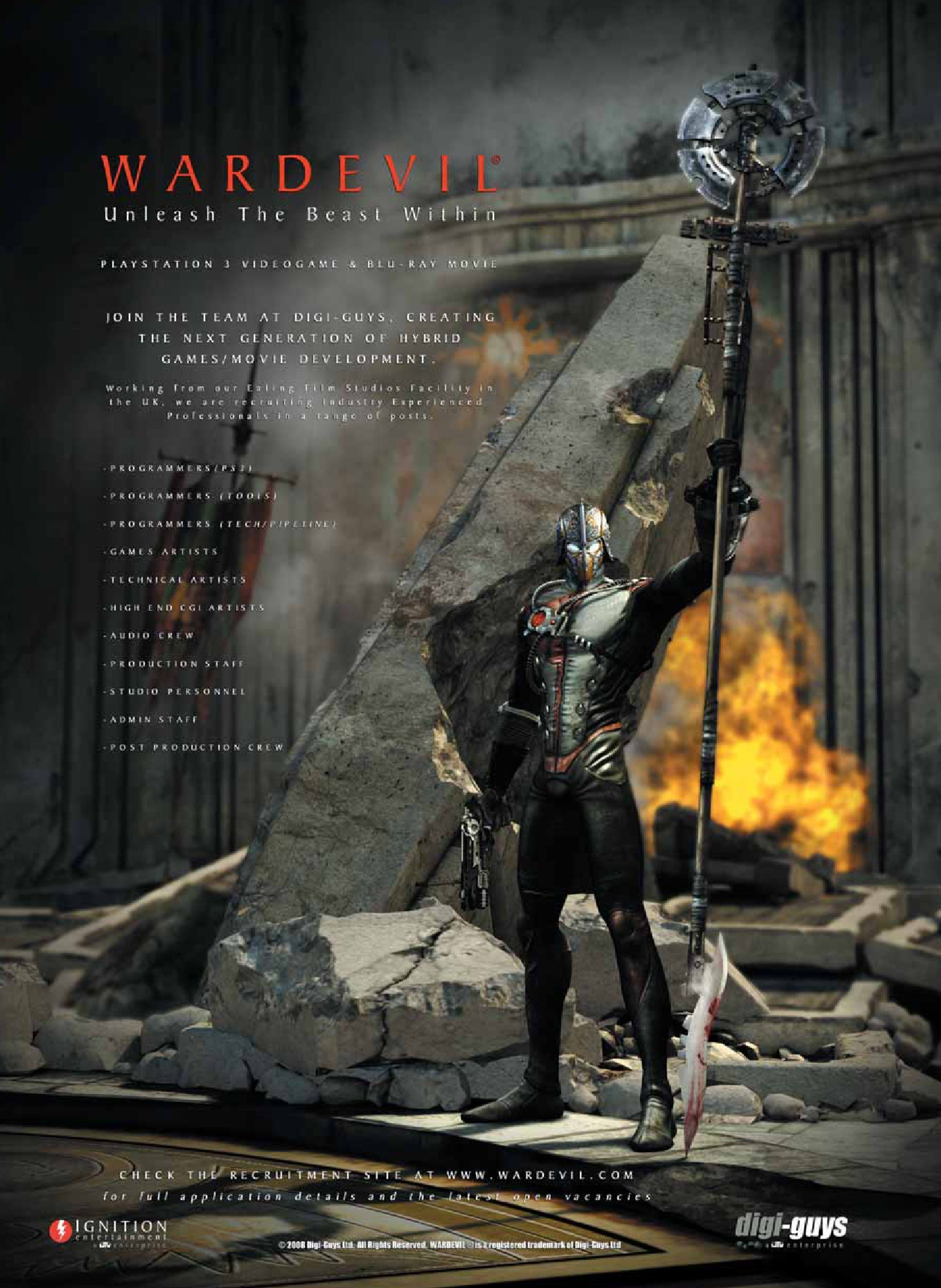

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Rich pickings

The 'recruitment crisis': it was coming, it came, but has it gone? And just what have UK studios been doing to rectify the situation? **Ed Fear** investigates whether the job market is any rosier in 2008...

This time last year, those studios looking to grow their ranks were complaining about a 'recruitment crisis' that had seen ballooning team sizes put pressure on game development teams around the world to grow.

However, it seems today that the shock of the new-gen has calmed somewhat, and studios are handling recruitment far better – specifically via casting their net wider for more diverse talent, and more keenly looking to welcome new blood into the industry through various schemes.

COURSE FOR CONCERN

One of the traditional complaints has been that university courses, and in particular those dedicated to game development, aren't producing graduates ready to enter the real world studio environment.

For a while, blame was placed squarely at academia's door for not teaching the right things – but, as the schools countered, how were they to independently produce a curriculum that would meet all these vague needs; needs that likely changed from studio to studio?

The solution, we've seen, is the establishment of formal links with universities and cooperation on preparing curriculi. Blitz, well known as being the first studio to hold public open days for students to learn more about game development and experience the atmosphere of a studio, also has an annual open day just for course lecturers.

> ***"It seems the shock of the new-gen has calmed somewhat, and studios are handling recruitment far better..."***

The problem, says the studio's education liason officer Kim Blake, is that there were – and still are – a huge number of courses, games-related or not, that simply don't teach some of the absolutely core skills necessary for development. "We try to work with courses who are producing good quality graduates in the fields we need; it's irrelevant to us whether they are games-specific or not as long as they are teaching the core skills we need.

"What is crucial is that these courses need to teach specific disciplines – programming, animation, 3D art – and not try to cram all the disciplines into any given course. A degree course that tries to combine disciplines cannot turn out graduates with the necessary skills to get a job in the industry."

Not all studios are so keen on the concept of formal links with universities, one of them being Rebellion CEO Jason Kingsley. This may sound as if Rebellion is one of those studios reticent to hire graduates, but actually, the company has found much success from doing so. Rather, it's a telling indication of Rebellion's belief that qualifications aren't quite so important when compared to potential.

"We tend to look as much at hobbies and interests as specific type of degrees," says Kingsley. "For example, we're more than happy to consider graduates with no industry experience but suitable talents and enthusiasm, and we'll help them to train on the job. We hire people from anywhere if they fit our criteria of skill, passion and personality."

And yet, regardless of how you look at, won't there always be a 'crisis' depending on how you define it?

One of the key factors is not being able to find all the staff that you need – but, as the quality bar continues to rise both within the generational cycle as well as in between it, team requirements will similarly bloat. Even if there was a perfect pipeline bringing qualified staff into the industry, would it ever be enough?

"I don't think we ever catch up," warns Kevin Taylor of NCsoft, which is currently building its new development team in Brighton. "We can always do better. Additionally, with all the new platforms and techniques, the ground keeps shifting. The bar keeps being raised."

Kingsley agrees, adding: "The industry is expanding, and games are taking more talented people to make them than ever before. In that sense, there will always be a bit of a skills shortage."

> ***"More and more studios are looking outside of our industry to fulfil not only raw headcount demands, but also the new needs of contemporary development…"***

It's not surprising, then, that more and more studios are looking outside of our industry to fulfil not only raw headcount demands but also the new needs of contemporary development. In fact, all of the studios we spoke to revealed that they recruit from outside the industry; some proactively.

"We've hired people from communities such as non-game related art, social networking and general programming, amongst others," continues Taylor. "It's vital to share information. Good ideas come from a variety of different sources and countries - it's counter-productive to be too insular, and so it's necessary for us to continually look beyond the confines of our own industry."

The widening remit of game development is also leading more studios to offer in-house training on both new techniques inside the industry sphere as well as from tangental disciplines.

"Since we were acquired by Disney we have a huge list of training courses available to us," says Dawn Beasley, senior recruiter at Black Rock, a studio which continues to hire producers from outside of the industry from companies as diverse as Ford, Lloyds TSB and the BBC as well as the games industry itself.

"We also offer bespoke training and team events which come from suggestions within the studio, such as a cinematography course, life drawing classes and trips to Disney's Imagineering ride-building department. We also regularly have guest speakers in the studio to give talks on all sorts of topics – even precomputed radiance transfer lighting."

Blitz is another company that encourages its staff to take on new skills as they work, both through external training and through the internal Blitz Academy, which allows people to share their skills and communicate their specialist techniques and time-saving solutions.

But, as Blake explains, they've not had to force their workers to further themselves: "We encourage people to continue improving their skills throughout the careers, but we've found that most developers are learning junkies. They want to keep improving, keep learning new things, and they enjoy communicating what they've learned to their peers."

CALMING THE CRISIS

One year ago we wrote that the 'recruitment crisis' was actually three problems masquerading as one: "barely a ration of available candidates, a haemorrhaging of experienced staff to other industries, and a worrying lack of adequately trained graduates to plug the gap".

Those concerns haven't magically disappeared during the intervening period – but that's the point. The improvements we've seen from talking to studios have all been down to realising that no matter how much we'd all like it to, no magic wand is going to solve the problem, and neither is sitting back and hoping that either time – or Government subsidies – are going to kill it. Only through proactively addressing each of these problems head-on has there been any progress – widening the candidate pool to other industries and therefore being willing to train those with no games experience, addressing the real quality of life issues that underlie staff mobility, and working on training programmes to bring graduates up to speed.

It's not an easy task, especially when you're trying to get a monster game out of the door, but perhaps it's simply a necessity in this day and age. That's not to say that the problem has been solved – "I still don't think our industry is doing enough to attract graduates in the UK," says Beasley – but it's an issue whose severity seems diminished from last year.

And, as more and more studios look to their peers to see what they should be doing, we'll see further development on these programmes – and one day, hopefully, recruitment will be less a 'crisis' and more a 'challenge'.

KEEPING TALENT HAPPY

One of the other key problems enumerated previously is that of keeping the talent you've already got and preventing them from jumping to other studios or, even worse, having such a bad experience that they leave the industry altogether.

The post-EA Spouse world isn't quite as rosy as some would have hoped, but there's certainly been an increased focus on quality of life issues.

"It's vital that the UK development studios and publishers to understand that they compete in an international market, and therefore must be prepared to pay and treat staff at least equivalent to leading international standards," says NCSoft's Kevin Taylor.

"I think there's pervasive undervaluing of UK development staff in terms of financial compensation – and perhaps more importantly individual responsibility within a team – and this, if it continues, will certainly lead to UK talent leaving the country."

The other thing to bear in mind is that, with new forms of gaming continually appearing, there's countless temptations for something new. Casual games, small-form digitally distributed games and socially-focused games all offer a different working environment to working on a next-gen triple-A blockbuster, and will naturally appeal to certain types of people regardless of how well they are treated in their current position.

What's interesting is exploring the scope for tackling these sorts of projects within existing studios – Square Enix's forthcoming *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* WiiWare title was borne from one programmer's discontent at constantly being a tiny part of a massive machine and, while the project was initially approached with caution by management, it enabled staff who dreamt of having a greater role in a game's evolution to spread their wings without flying the coop.

Hiring the elusive female developer

How can studios go about widening their talent base to include developers from the fairer sex? **Angela Fenge**, operations and marketing director at Zoë Mode, reveals a few secrets…

When we rebranded our studio to Zoë Mode back in March last year, one of the goals we had in mind was to attract more female developers to the studio.

As we all know, games development has traditionally been the domain of young men, but we were keen to break that mould and have a much more diverse team. We felt that putting a friendly face on our brand and making clear our focus on non violent social games would help to attract women to our studio. We weren't wrong.

In the last year we've managed to attract a number of new female staff to the studio, almost exclusively from outside of games development. By looking to other industries we've found experienced project managers that are excited about our studio and the games we make. We have female staff working on projects such as *SingStar* – often musicians who would never normally have considered joining a games development company, who have then gone on to other roles within the studio, working as designers and project managers.

Of course, it's still difficult to find female staff; applications from men outweigh those from women by more than ten to one, even more when you look at programming and senior management roles. Without industry-wide research it's hard to put a figure on what the average gender split is amongst the global development workforce, but at Zoë Mode ten per cent of our staff are female – a number we hope will increase in the coming year.

For many people there remains a perception of the games industry as a boys club, gaming being something that women just 'don't do'. While for a long time that was largely true, gaming is unquestionably hitting the mainstream now and we believe that for us to make the best games for our target audience, we need to be like our target audience.

So what are we doing? We're talking to students, not just at universities, but at colleges and schools, we're trying to open their eyes to the games industry and the opportunities that it presents. We're working with initiatives such as Dare to be Digital to help encourage more female students to get involved and give games a go. We're improving our working conditions; providing flexitime and cutting out crunch, so that a healthy work life balance is possible. We're looking outside of games development for people with the right skills and experience to transfer across into our studio and bring new perspectives and ideas into our teams.

More than that, though, we need to promote our industry as a positive place to be, we need to provide a counterbalance to the negative stories in the mainstream media. Games are not just a violent misogynistic playground for disturbed teenage boys, they are a social activity for people of all ages and they can be a positive influence in our lives. We believe that by working to change the perception of our industry we can encourage more women to join us in making games for everyone.

www.zoemode.com

***Ange Fenge** is is operations and marketing director at Zoë Mode, Kuju Entertainment's Brighton, UK-based independent social, music and party games studio*

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Points of 'view

So you're just getting into the industry or looking to change job – but how do you ace the interview process? Amiqus' **Peter Leonard** and **Louise Beattie** offer up some advice…

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

■ 1. Read the Job Description

Seems rudimentary but is the best way to prepare. By reading through and understanding the job description you can ensure you are aware of the essential and desirable skills an employer is looking for.

■ 2. Make a list of your primary skills

While most will have a varied set of skills that they can provide an employer with, it is always beneficial to have uppermost in your mind where your greatest strengths lie so that you can illustrate where you can add the most value to a project.

■ 3. Understand your previous professional achievements

Employers are looking for more than just skill sets and experience; they want candidates who are able to solve potentially serious problems. Think about and be ready to talk through examples of previous occurrences where you have had to solve such a problem for a previous or your current employer, and how this was of benefit to the project you were working on.

■ 4. Research the company

A very simple and effective way to do this is to visit the company website which will provide you with crucial information such as background, softography, and key personnel. This is very important, as it shows significant interest in the company, their products and thus highlights your desire to work for them on their projects. Other ways to do this can be to read reviews of their previous titles or search out interviews with lead developers.

■ 5. Play/critique previous games

Although this is not an essential interview preparation tool, many studios are extremely impressed with candidates who go the extra mile and spend a little time with one or more of their previous games. A critique will provide you with an opportunity to express how you may perhaps bring new or improvement ideas to the discussion around a particular element of their game dependant on your discipline. This process provides a candidate with the opportunity to present constructive criticism and demonstrate your value, and potential ideas in order to elevate the quality of a product even further.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT AN INTERVIEW

Interview styles can vary from company to company, but they all aim to clarify the same information; that you are technically qualified to do the job, motivated to do it well and that you will have no problem in fitting in with the team. Whilst preparing it is important to re-read your application, thinking through your own career and the questions you might be asked about it. You should also anticipate the general questions that you will be asked and prepare some of your own. The following examples are designed to help with this:

QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE ROLE

Why do you want this job?; Why do you want to work for this company?; What do you know about the company?; What is your interpretation of the role?

Always stress the positive aspects that have attracted you to this position, avoiding money, hours and negative comments about your current employer. When discussing your interpretation of the role, link aspects to your current position showing your ability to do the job.

QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR SKILLS

Why should we employ you?; What is your greatest achievement to date?; Would you say your career has been successful so far?; What are your strengths and weaknesses?

This is your chance to shine: tell them about your achievements that relate to this particular position and their needs. Place your emphasis on your enjoyment of a role rather than what you can gain from it. Select strengths that are relevant to this job and you can give good examples for. When choosing a weakness, go for something that you can turn into a positive.

CAREER ASPIRATIONS/MOTIVATIONS:

Why did you join your current company?; Why are you leaving now?; What are you looking for in your next role/employer?; Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

A future employer will always want to know about your motivations for changing jobs, so be positive about your reasons for joining and leaving a company. Be careful not to be negative about your current employer, this is not good practice. Career goals should always relate to the company and role you are interviewing for, but do not give the impression that you will be going straight for the interviewer's job. Be positive, but not arrogant.

MORE CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

Can you work under pressure?; What motivates you?; How do you handle criticism?; What salary would you be expecting for this position?; Are you considering any other positions at the moment?

You need to show that you can work under pressure; give examples of where you have done this well and express that you work well with deadlines, keeping your mind focused and assisting you in your performance. You also need to show that you can handle criticism. A good way to do this is to say that you are happy to take on board any constructive criticism as it helps to understand and learn from the situation.

Answer questions about salary carefully as they may be referred to at offer stage. You could say that you do not want to prejudice yourself by coming in too high or too low and would like to discuss the responsibilities of the role before salary. It is fair to let the interviewer know about other offers and opportunities you are considering to ensure they give a realistic offer that you would consider alongside others if you were successful at interview.

MORE PERSONAL QUESTIONS

How would you describe yourself?; How would your friends/colleagues/referees describe you?; What interests do you have outside of work?

Here's your chance to demonstrate that you are easy to get on with, a team player who works well with others. When describing yourself, pick your best attributes and achievements related to your career. Your hobbies and interests can say a lot about you (e.g. sociable, solitary), so be honest and think carefully about what will paint the best picture of you.

When answering questions you should be positive about you and your abilities, avoid waffling and not try to give 'yes' or 'no' answers as they can be conversation stoppers. By asking your own questions at the end, you can ensure that you have enough information to determine whether the job is right for you at the same time as showing your interest and enthusiasm about joining the company.

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OPINION

by Kim Blake, Blitz Games

What do 'demand-led skills' really mean for games?

Demand-led, market-driven, employer-led; whatever this month's phraseology is, everyone, it seems, is keen on ensuring that university and college students learn and perfect the skills that their potential employers need. This is not a new idea, but is currently yet again a particular focus for Government and industry.

In theory, there is no problem at all with the skills that power the UK games industry being driven by the companies that will employ them. While blue sky research and theoretical thinking certainly have their place, it is essential that new recruits entering the games industry have the core skills, knowledge and attitudes that equip them to immediately begin a productive and enjoyable career.

How we achieve this, however, is a different matter. There are two areas of pressing concern; the first centres on the difficulties of teaching something that is constantly changing; the second is more of a profile issue, a question of how games and games development are perceived by the wider community.

I'd like to talk much more about this second point, but space dictates that I keep current comments to this: we as developers need to start working hard to change our image, not only because we need to attract talented people to work in all areas of development (especially with the ever-increasing competition from other industries and from government-supported games sectors overseas), but also because it's becoming very important that we ensure the public see another side of us than the 'ban this sick filth' headlines so beloved of certain sections of the media.

Blitz, like other developers, is often asked for advice on careers in games. In one sense, the answers are simple and similar for both educators and potential employees: focus on core skills, don't neglect soft skills such as communication skills and team working, and present yourself and your work professionally. Skillset has done an excellent job of collating this information and I urge anyone interested in a career in games, or in teaching such courses, to read their website (www.skillset.org/games) and of course our own GameON site (www.blitzgames.com/gameon/).

It's essential that everyone understands what the core skills are, especially those teaching them. It is also extremely important that games-related courses do not try to cover all aspects of development, and that they appreciate that studios will only hire the best of the best. While it is important that the students gain an understanding of how all the inter-related disciplines of development work together and to stress that in games no-one works alone, it is no kindness to students to offer a piecemeal approach where they spend a few months on programming, a few months on 3D modelling and a few months on animation. Bluntly, we will not hire 'Jacks of all trades'; they simply do not have the skills we need. What we want are highly skilled programmers, highly skilled artists and so on.

Where does the money go?
VAT
Publisher
COGs

> ***"I consider it frankly immoral to encourage students to spend money on a course that can never deliver…"***

Allied to this is the tendency for some institutions to add 'games' to a course title simply to increase the number of students. I consider it frankly immoral to encourage students to spend three years of their lives and a great deal of money on a course that can never deliver what they need.

In addition, the decision of some educational managers to drop the quality bar, again to allow greater numbers, is completely indefensible. This is not to say that courses should not take students with potential and help them to achieve greater things – that is after all what education should always be about – but offering places to students who plainly don't have the talent simply wastes the energy of those teaching the course and means that scarce resources and time are diverted from students who would really benefit, to the detriment of all.

Getting industry input into a course is essential, partly so that the core skills issue can be addressed in depth, and partly because of the speed of change in the industry. Even people who have previously worked in development will find that within a couple of years (sometimes less), their knowledge is out of date and this has obvious implications for the skills being taught.

The problem here, though, is that although forward-thinking universities and colleges do approach developers for their advice and input, all too often the developers, particularly smaller or independent studios, feel that they simply cannot afford the time and cost. After all, this is their business, and project schedules are short enough without losing time to activities that seem to have no immediate bearing on their problems.

This is alarmingly short-term thinking. True, we're not all EA or Microsoft, who both have dedicated staff and budgets for their academic support; but even smaller companies can help out. There are almost always times in any schedule when senior people can be spared to give a talk or hold a workshop, which benefits them and their company as well as those they are teaching. Preparing a presentation is not a small amount of work; but by helping out, we can ensure that the new talent we all need does indeed have the skills and attitudes that development needs to continue making great games.

Kim Blake is education liason officer at Blitz Games

www.blitzgames.com

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richard.chipchase@thq.com

Team sports

So you've hired the staff and trained the graduates – but what about how the wider staff base is organised and interacts? Twelve J's **Kumar Jacob** offers advice and information for project leads and studio heads looking to best understand multicultural team dynamics…

The way we do things around here' is how organisational culture is often defined. There is no doubt that appropriate organisational culture is all important for the success of a company and for it to reach its goals. Many factors play a part in shaping this culture and one of them is national culture.

But with many development studios hiring worldwide for high quality staff, we now see games teams representing nationalities from all corners of the world. It is therefore worth looking at the impact of national culture on those teams, in order to understand how it can influence working relationships, especially at increasingly multicultural games studios.

Firstly, I must make clear that I believe our differences are to be valued and celebrated. Certainly one set of cultural characteristics cannot be said to be better than another – they simply are just different. But differences they are – don't ignore them. It is far better to understand the differences and in this context formulate strategies to manage individuals and teams than ignore them.

In an area that can easily be mis-interpreted, it is best that we look at widely accepted and respected research evidence. Not all will agree with the conclusions. At least the data can be used to draw appropriate conclusions.

Two pieces of work by Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars are worth exploring when it comes to understanding organisational culture in the workplace.

Hofstede carried out his research between 1967 and 1963. Whilst it was some time ago, the study nor the conclusions have particularly dated. The research was based on IBM employees worldwide. We must remember that IBM was then a large multinational and a manufacturer of computers – pre-PC of course. In his work, Hofstede defined culture as 'The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.' Hofstede came up with five cultural dimensions for how people perceived their role in the workplace. From his initial work Hofstede came up with four cultural dimensions:

> **"Our differences are to be valued and celebrated. But don't ignore them…"**

- Power Distance Index (PDI): The extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally
- Individualism (IDV): Versus its opposite collectivism, that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups
- Masculinity (MAS): Refers to the value placed on traditionally male or female values (as understood in most Western cultures).
- Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI): Reflects the extent to which members of a society attempt to cope with anxiety by minimising uncertainty

Following further study, he also added a fifth dimension:

- Long-Term Orientation: Describes the society's 'time horizon' or the importance attached to future versus the past and present

It's the Power Distance Index and Masculinity that is most relevant to games studios.

The PDI is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. That is, how we see our bosses and how we relate to them.

In analysing this, Hofstede researched various countries, giving each a score. In countries with low power distance – e.g. Austria, Denmark, Israel, etc. – they expect and accept power relations that are more consultative or democratic. People relate to each other more as equals irrespective of formal positions.

In countries with large power distance – France, India, China, etc. – hierarchies are more readily accepted. Power is accepted where it lies: i.e. with the boss. Figure 1 shows some relative scores.

Meanwhile Masculinity as a cultural dimension is defined by what are traditionally seen as masculine and feminine values. Namely: the 'masculine' cultures value competitiveness, ambition, accumulation of wealth and material possessions while feminine cultures value relationships and quality of life. Figure 2 shows some sample sources for this. As can be seen from the scores for these dimensions, national cultures do not fall into a simple East/West or developed/developing countries divide, although they may relate to corporate culture at game studios in each respective territory.

Fons Trompenaars is another acknowledged authority on this subject and runs an international consultancy from Amsterdam. He worked more than 15 years for the Royal Dutch Shell Group in nine different countries. During this time he collected important information for his seminars on the subject 'cross-cultural management'. Based on his seminars and training programmes, Fons Trompenaars created a database which consists of 65,000 participants today.

Trompenaars developed the 'Seven Dimensions of Culture Model' for the analysis of cultural differences. The seven dimensions that Tromperaars came up with are as follows:

- ■ Universalism v particularism (What is more important, rules or relationships?)
- ■ Individualism vs. communitarianism (Do we function in a group or as individuals?)
- ■ Neutral or affective (Do we display our emotions?)
- ■ Specific vs. diffuse (Is responsibility specifically assigned or diffusely accepted?)
- ■ Achievement vs. ascription (Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status or is it given to us?)
- ■ Sequential vs. syncronic (Do we do things one at a time or several things at once?)
- ■ Internal vs. external control (Do we control our environment or are we controlled by it?)

Trompenaars uses the following scenario to specifically research the universalism versus particularism dimension: "You are riding in a car driven by a close friend. He hits a pedestrian. He was driving at 35 mph on road where he should have been doing 20 mph. There are no witnesses. His lawyer says that if you testify under oath that he was within the speed limit, he will be saved from serious consequences. What right has your friend to expect you to testify for him?"

> *"Many issues that impact a studio's culture are affected by various cultural dimensions..."*

Universalist societies would consider that he has no right or even if he has some right, one should not testify. Particularist societies on the other hand will view this dilemma from the point of view of relationships and be willing to testify. Some feel that condition of the pedestrian will have an effect on the decision. Again the decision could go in opposite directions with some saying that the friend should be protected if the pedestrian is seriously injured. Figure 3 shows how respondents from different territories view the case.

SO WHAT HAS ANY OF THIS GOT TO DO WITH GAME DEVELOPMENT?

Many issues that affect a development studio's culture and hence its chances of success, such as communication, management and leadership style, and team dynamics are affected by various cultural dimensions.

Therefore, it is useful for studio managers and seniors to understand some of the findings from relevant research studies.

For example, communication is often very difficult to get right in any studio. We already have issues arising because of divisions between the functional groups – programmers, artists, designers etc. If a studio has staff from many nations and cultures further dimensions play a part. Some effort by managers and seniors to understand the issues and get underneath the surface will help.

This is not an issue confined to those with outsourced work in countries such as India and China. Whilst there are specific issues in those circumstances, much can be done within studios to get communication right by senior managers better understanding and appreciating cultural dimensions.

www.twelvej.com

Figure 1: Power Distance Index samples

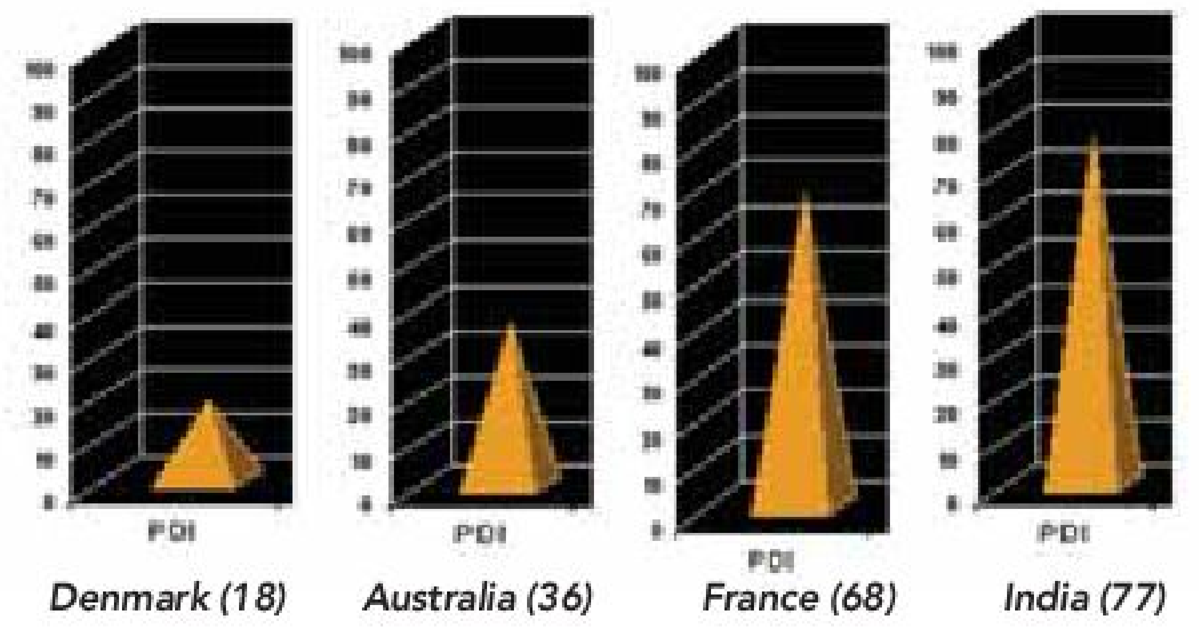
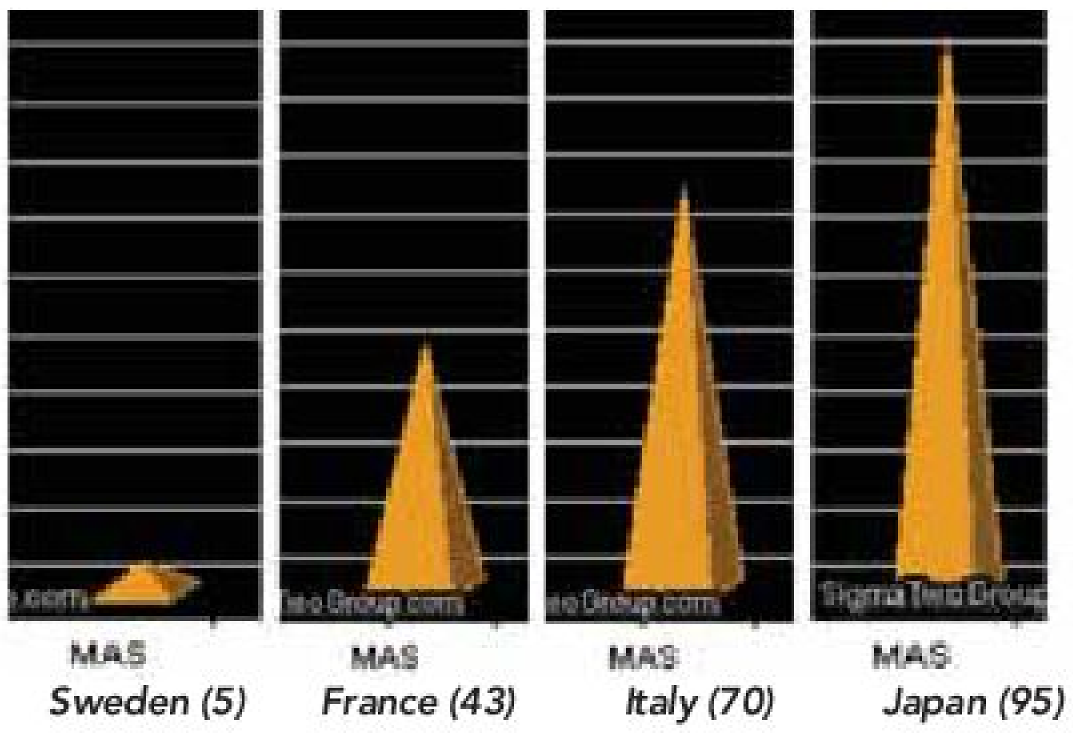
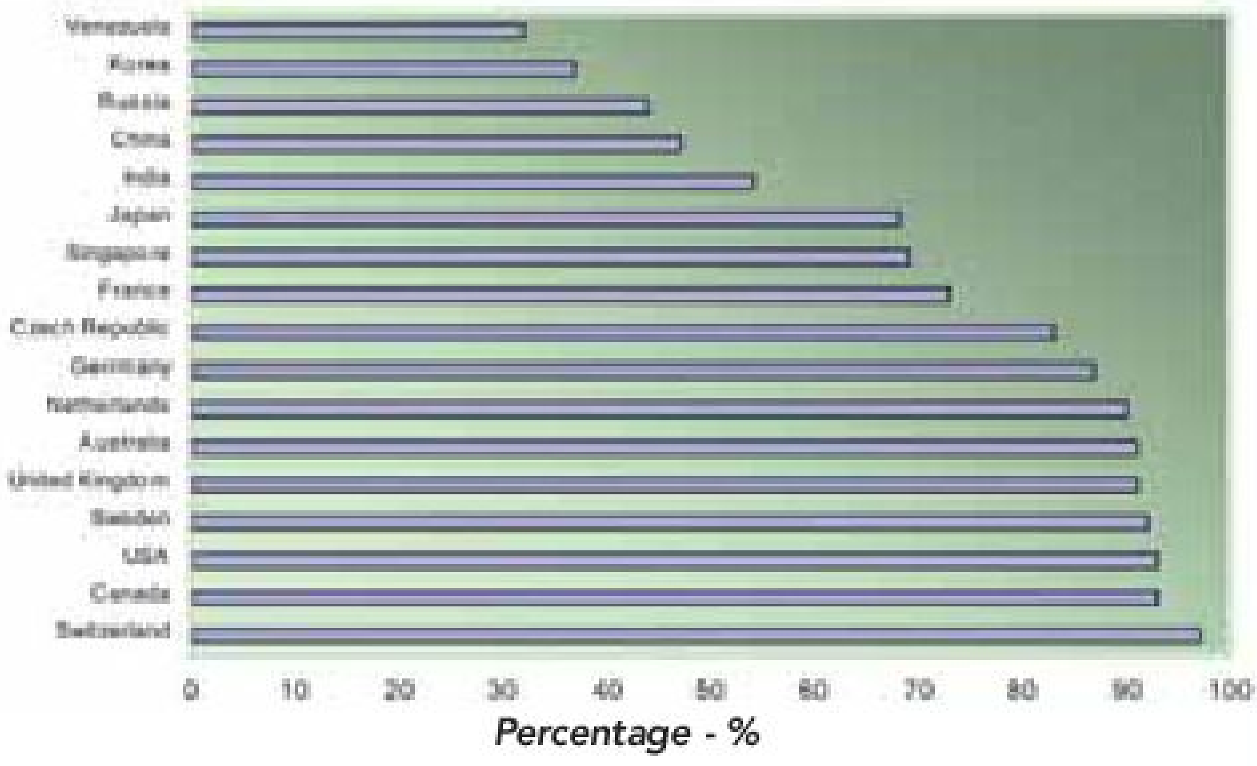
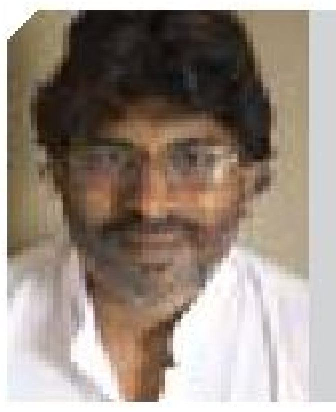


Figure 2: Masculinity score samples



Friend has no/some right and would not help





***Kumar Jacob** is is CEO of TwelveJ, a consultancy specialising in devising and implementing training at development studios, with programmes designed to tackle specific areas and include; leadership for senior management and transition to management for seniors and leads. He has has implemented training for SCEE, Media Molecule and FreeStyleGames. Prior to founding Twelve J, Kumar was VP corporate affairs at Criterion Software.*

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TOOLS: The latest tech news

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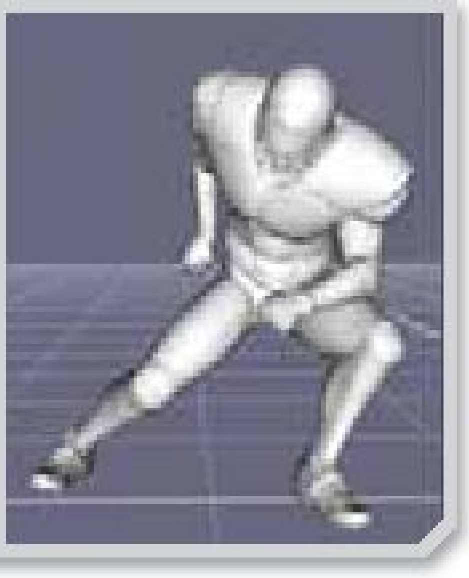

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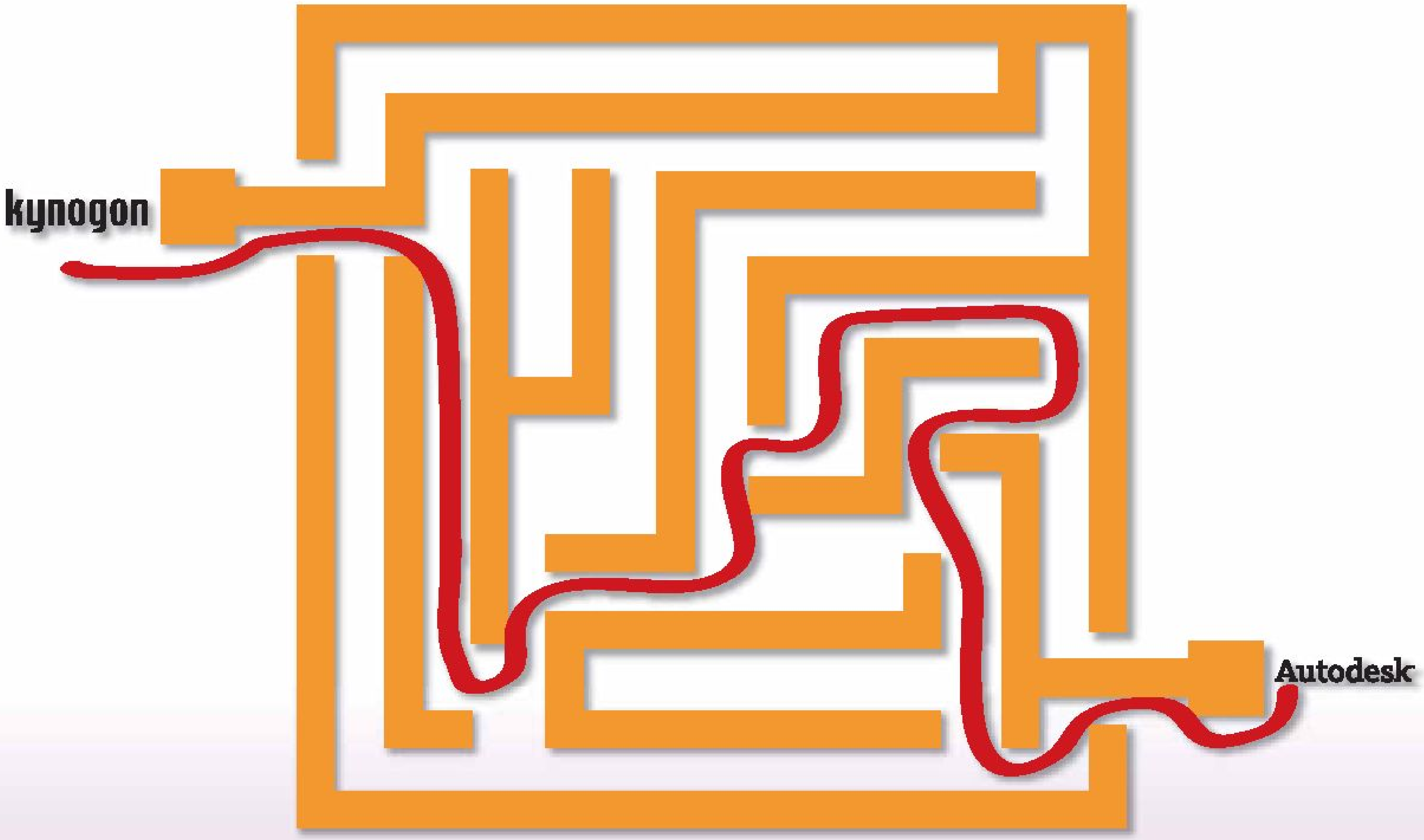

Path Finding

What led Autodesk to buy Kynogon, p59

Of sprats and whales

BIG FISH SWALLOW THE little fish. That's the way of the ocean and that's the way of the technology ecosystem too.

Of course, what makes the whole thing really interesting is the odd occasion, like in the cartoon, where the little fish somehow manages to engorge its bigger rival and, burping slightly, swims off into the distance. After all, most big fish gain their stature by powering through the fry stage thanks to an overly aggressive appetite when it comes to lunchtime.

The difference in scale between the recent players in the middleware consolidation is a significant factor in the other direction however. With the exception of Epic's $1 (or $2) billion Microsoft 'vaporaluation' (probably not too rich considering Epic's monopoly position in terms of engine tech plus the hugely profitable games side), the financial ratio of buyers to sellers can only be measured in fractions of a percent. Frankly these aren't deals that are being done to enter the fast growing middleware market. The financial upside just isn't there for the big guys.

No, as the MDs of the little guys will admit, if you catch them in a honest moment, these deals are all about what might otherwise be considered secondary factors; gaining experienced staff and management, demonstrating strategic vision to other big players, even defensive moves to mess up someone else's business.

In a sense, therefore, it's a sign that for the next couple of years the freeform days of the middleware market are over. From EA and Criterion to Autodesk and Kynogon, the most successful and stable middleware companies have been picked up. The bottom line is: everyone still standing is currently either too niche, or too immature, to be of interest.

Jon Jordan
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< CODING >

SMASHING SHOW

Safe in the arms of Intel, Havok made the most of GDC08 showing versions 5.5 and 6 of its tech…

DURING A SHOW WHERE corporate consolidation of the middleware space was the over-riding headline, Havok's MD David O'Meara was sitting pretty. Having dealt with the sale of the company in September 2007, he was well past the signing on the dotted line phase. Instead he was looking forward to Havok's future.

"We operate independently from Intel," he says, explaining the impact of the takeover on the day-to-day running of the company. "I report to the Havok board, which now has a Intel senior vice president as chairman but the board operates in the interests of Havok." Indeed, he says part of the point of the deal was that Intel wanted to show it could let smaller technology subsidiaries, of which Havok is the first, operate at arm's length.

So as company reaches its tenth anniversary, a period that's seen its technology featured in over 200 games, what's next?

Well, GDC08 saw the release of the 5.5 versions for each of the company's physics-based components; Havok Physics, Havok Animation and Havok Behavior. These, respectively, feature: a new optimised continuous physics solution; multi-threading optimisations and spline-based compressions for reduced memory consumption; and an enhanced SDK allowing for improved workflow and better asset management features.

More significant though was the early showcase of the Havok 6 release, due to arrive in June, which will see the arrival of the Cloth and Destruction modules. Integrated with Havok Physics and Animation, Cloth is a visually-focused technology while Destruction has more potential in terms of new gameplay options.

Havok 6

Price: Available on request
Company: Havok
Contact: +353 1 472 4300

Built with particular attention in terms of getting good streaming performance on the PlayStation 3's SPUs, Cloth is character-based, providing a high level of simulation for materials such as capes, shirts, skirts and ponytails, while providing flexible tools in terms of applying constraints and skinning parts of cloth objects to a character while fully simulating other parts.

Destruction is designed to help deal with the increasing resources required to create broken and deformed in-game assets. Its fracture generator lets you automatically calculate fracture lines and the subsequent shapes and structural damage. These can be stored offline or generated in real-time, and it provides control over the number and position of fracture pieces and the texturing of exposed faces.

www.havok.com

Virtools 4.1

Price: Available on request
Company: Dassault Systèmes
Contact: +33 1 40 99 40 99
www.virtools.com

At the same time Dassault Systèmes is promoting its new game development platform, 3DVIA MP, the underlying technology Virtools also receives a point release. One key element sees the integration of Kynogon's Kynapse artificial intelligence engine, which is labelled AI library 2.0 in Virtools parlance, simplifiying path-finding generation and design of NPC behaviours. Another new feature is the Call Behavior building block, which enables you to instantiate a behaviour graph. Support for Microsoft Vista and 3D XML v4 is added, while outputting to virtual reality displays is streamlined and the Virtools SDK moves to Visual Studio.net 2005.

Torque for Wii v1.5

Price: Available on request
Company: GarageGames/Pronto Games
Contact: +1 541 345 3040
www.garagegames.com

Despite its InstantAction casual browser-based site being nearly ready to go live, GarageGames is making sure its Torque platform is being kept up-to-date with its Wii version hitting the 1.5 point release. Developed for GarageGames by Pronto Games, this version is the first to use Torque's characteristic 2D drag and drop functionality. As you'd expect it also features support for the Wii Remote, offers optimised skinned mesh rendering, compressed textures and hardware blending for terrain textures. Exact pricing hasn't been announced but it follows a zero-royalty, flat-fee structure and is heavily discounted for games targeting the WiiWare downloadable service.

< ART >

GETTING MORE OUT

Daz 3D content has been opened up for games thanks to the MOGbox

WHILE THERE'S ALWAYS PLENTY of action when it comes to art packages such as Maya and XSI, perhaps the most significant changes are happening at the entry level as hardcore features are added to what were relatively unsophisticated products. That's certainly the case at Daz 3D, where its free Daz Studio is now offering a feast of exchange options.

Prior to GDC Daz had announced its 3D Bridge for Photoshop plug-in, enabling you to view 3D scenes as Photoshop layers and composite 2D and 3D content seamlessly. This followed the release of the SDK Plug-in Architecture and support for the COLLADA standard – and at the show itself the MOGbox, a collaboration between Daz and games production tools company MOGware, was shown.

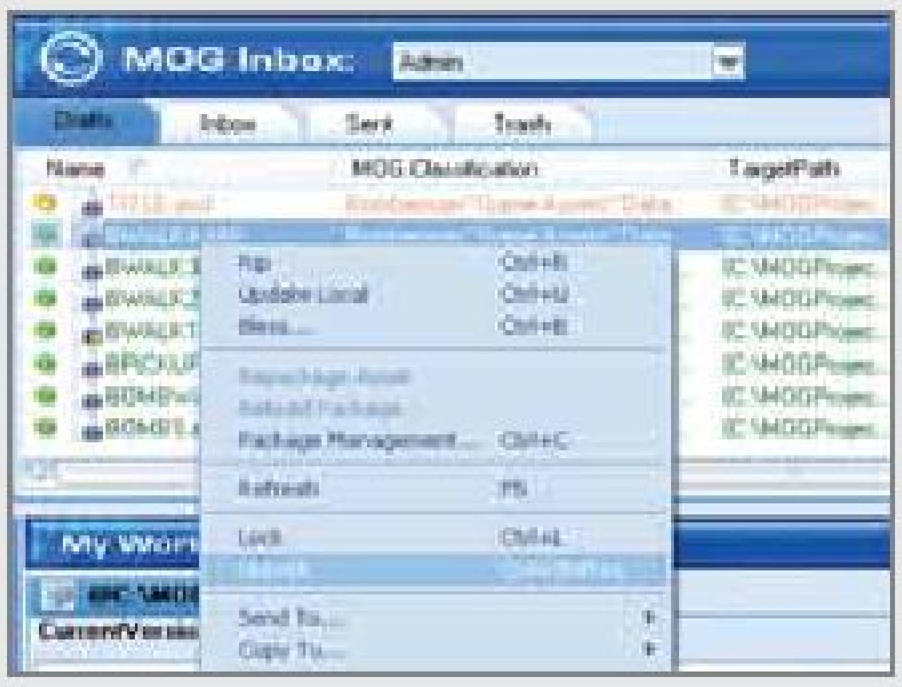
The automatic pipeline is designed to enable Daz Studio users to export their characters and assets in a game-friendly manner, with attributes such as geometry, level of detail, maps, rigging and animation maintained in a target-appropriate way.

"Game developers spend a large amount of time creating and reformatting 3D content so that it will work in various game engines," commented Dan Farr, president of Daz 3D. "Thanks to Mogware, we've solved one of the most difficult challenges as now users are able to move any 3D content very quickly from one environment or format to another."

The first game developer to announce support MOGbox is online platform developer Multiverse Network.

www.daz3d.com

MOGbox



Price: Free
Company: Daz 3D/Mogware
Contact: +1 801 495 1777

3ds Max 2009

Price: $3,495, upgrade from 2008 $895
Company: Autodesk
Contact: +44 207 851 8000
www.autodesk.com

After all the fuss about 3ds Max versus Maya when Autodesk bought Alias, the first significant demonstration of future product divergence has ironically come in the shape of two different versions of 3ds Max.

Split into the vanilla 3ds Max 2009 (which has been labelled Entertainment in some quarters) and 3ds Max 2009 Design (officially by Autodesk), the core features remain the same, only with Design version getting the Exposure natural and artificial light simulator but lacking the SDK. New features for both include better quadruped support within Biped, better UV editing tools, improved inport and export of OBJ and FBX file formats.

Morpheme 1.3

Price: Available on request
Company: NaturalMotion
Contact: +44 1865 250 575
www.naturalmotion.com

NaturalMotion's animation pipeline tool morpheme clocks up another point release with its 1.3 version. One key piece of news is the middleware's integration within Epic's Unreal Engine 3 as part of the Integrated Partners Program. The quality of in-game animation is enhanced with the ability to set up inverse kinematic nodes for common tasks, and the creation and automatic constraint matching for detection of events such as footsteps. The live debugging of remote runtime targets and a fully-scripted user interface are also included, while the creation of multiple characters or levels of detail are now enabled within animation sets.

< AUDIO >

BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE

Audiokinetic's Wwise Motion generates rumbles from sound

WITH CONTROLLERS AND HAPTIC devices becoming an ever more sophisticated part of gaming immersion, Audiokinetic's latest tool could prove to be a nice little earner for the audio provider.

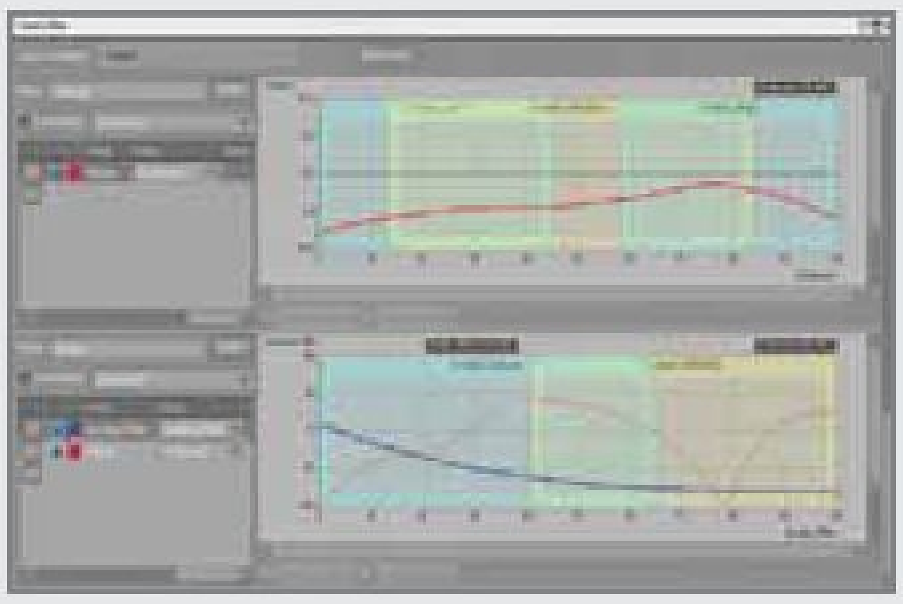
Called Wwise Motion, it's based around the same workflow as company's Wwise pipeline but instead of being used to create in-game audio, it's designed to generate forcefeedback motion directly from in-game sounds.

As with Wwise, it has to be integrated into your game engine to work. Once completed however Audiokinetic claims a single line of code is required to turn on the feature which supports Vista, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Wii controllers.

A user interface enables you to select the sounds you want to trigger the rumble effects, with properties such as volume, pitch, or low pass filter available in order to fine-tune the motion effects. In terms of how the motion is triggered, there are two options. The most straightforward is an automatic system whereby you flag a sound, such as an explosion, to automatically generate motion. Based on Wwise's distance attenuation, the intensity of the rumble felt by the player will be proportional to their proximity to the event. Alternatively, you can use a custom effect by creating your own algorithm as a source plug-in or attaching your game physics engine to the motion engine to automatically generate motion.

www.audiokinetic.com

Wwise Motion



Price: $2k per platform or $5k per game
Company: Audiokinetic
Contact: +01 514 499 9100,
sales@audiokinetic.com

TeamSpirit

Price: Available on request
Company: Spirit DSP
Contact: +1 678 571 2254
www.spiritdsp.com

There are plenty of options when it comes to in-game MMOG voice chat but, as Russian company Spirit DSP's TeamSpirit Conferencing Engine is behind the chat within *World of Warcraft*, it should be able to handle as much traffic as you can throw at it.

Still, when you're talking about millions of subscribers, maintaining cost effective bandwidth is as important as quality; a balancing act Spirit claims it can meet thanks to its IP-MR wideband codec which can adapt to any bandwidth connection without transcoding. Spirit also reckons that 200 concurrent connections can be handled on a single dual-core Intel-based server.

Interactive XMF v0.9

Price: Not applicable
Company: IASIG
Contact: Via website
www.iasig.org

It's taken a while (since June 2003) for the Interactive Audio Special Interest Group to get around to releasing its draft specification for a new interactive audio file format based on the open-standard XMF file format. Known as iXMF, it's designed to be an cross-platform standard that will simplify tool and middleware development while providing an abstracted interface between audio engineers and coders and hence ensuring audio engineers have greater control over in-game audio. Now seeking feedback on the 59 page document, the IASIG hopes to release the final approved specification on iXMF and its Soundtrack Manager tool by August 2008.

GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE 08

18-19 JUNE 2008
Newcastle, UK

Confirmed speakers include:

- Martin De Ronde, OneBigGame
  Founder and chairman of the world's first non-profit games publisher.
- Chris Lee, FreeStyleGames
  Commercial Director at FreeStyleGames, the team behind BAFTA nominated breakdancing game, *B-Boy.*
- Julien Merceron, Eidos
  Worldwide CTO, mainly responsible for Technology Strategy as well as Online and Outsourcing considerations at Eidos.
- Todd Eckert, Film Producer
  Producer of BAFTA award-winning film *Control.*

More speakers to follow, watch this space for the latest announcements

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magenta software

Established in 1994, Magenta Software is a UK Games Developer based in Liverpool, with offices located at the historic Albert Dock complex overlooking the waterfront of the River Mersey.

This BAFTA winning developer is currently expanding their development team and have openings for three new industry experienced professionals.

Character Animator
£Excellent + Benefits
SH342A

The ideal candidate for this role will be able to create in-game animations to a high standard in a variety of styles, from realistic to traditional cartoon. Preferably this person will be classically trained in animation and have strong skills in the rigging, modelling and texturing of characters. A good knowledge of 3DS Max and Character Studio would be ideal, though retraining will be offered to strong candidates.

Games Programmer
£Excellent + Benefits
KR342GP

The successful candidate in this role will need good communication and technical skills, and have at least 2 years of industry experience with 1 published title. Other essentials for this role include excellent C/C++ programming skills, sound mathematical ability (linear, algebra, trig, physics, etc), and a strong knowledge of the game-creation process for PS2, PS3, Wii or Xbox 360.

Games Designer
£Excellent + Benefits
SH342D

This position requires a good understanding of all aspects of game play, the ability to identify and analyse problems that arise within this, and subsequently being able to design creative and achievable solutions. This will necessitate a good knowledge of code and art related development issues and the ability to work well with these departments. Good knowledge of games past and present would also be of benefit.

For more information and a detailed job description please contact Simon Hope at Aardvark Swift Recruitment - simon@aswift.com

Web www.aswift.com Tel 01709 876877

Aardvark Swift Recruitment Silicon House, Farfield Park, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S63 5DB

AardvarkSwift

KEYRELEASE

PRODUCT: TBA
COMPANY: Autodesk/Kynogon
PRICE: TBA
CONTACT: +44 207 851 8000
W: www.autodesk.com

Out of the offline box

Thanks to its acquisition of Kynogon, Autodesk is moving up the pipeline into middleware…

INTEL (annual revenue $38 billion) has Havok and the Project Offset game engine. Nvidia (annual revenue $3.8 billion) has Ageia and, if you cast your mind back a couple of years, graphics optimisation specialist Hybrid too. It should be no surprise that big technology corporations are interested in game middleware.

But, despite owning the majority of most game developers' asset creation pipelines, Autodesk (annual revenue $1.8 billion), hadn't looked to move upstream into real-time smarts (back in the early 2000s, Alias tried the trick with the Maya Real-Time SDK but without much conviction). The surprise acquisition of French artificial intelligence company Kynogon, announced during GDC 2008, has changed that conventional wisdom however.

"Autodesk isn't integrating Kynogon. Kynogon is integrating Autodesk," laughs a bullish Jacques Gaubil, who was approached together with fellow Kynogon co-founder Pierre Pontevia to head up Autodesk's new games technology group. They have the brief to bridge the gap between Autodesk's expertise in 3D asset creation and real-time engines.

On the simplest level, its Kynapse pathfinding engine provides a great fit with Autodesk's HumanIK animation engine, itself a product of Alias' acquisition of Kaydara back in 2004. Together with an as-yet unspecified physics engine, these three technologies are expected to be rolled out as an intelligent character animation package that can deal with navigating through dynamically changing environments.

"Our theme is Create, Animate and Integrate," confirms Rob Hoffman, Autodesk's senior 3D product marketing manager. "On the creation side we have 3ds Max, Maya and Mudbox and on the animate side we have MotionBuilder. The integration portion is about having more elements of the overall pipeline. The more elements we have on the runtime side, the more things we can make interoperable."

> **"The bottleneck is the interface between art packages and the game engine…"**
>
> **Jacques Gabil, Autodesk**

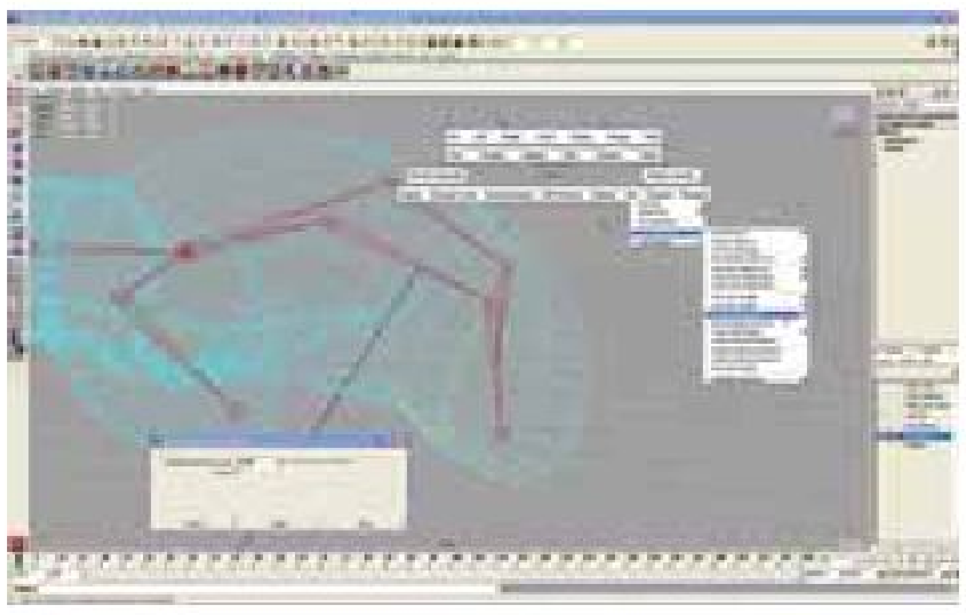
Part of Autodesk's decision making seems to have revolved around its experience of selling the HumanIK system. It's been used in high profile games such as EA Sports' titles and Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* but it was offered more as a consultancy service than a freely available middleware package like Kynapse.

"You have to crawl before you can walk, walk before you can run and run before you become an Olympian," Hoffman points out. "We started working with some Tier 1 customers to make sure the interest was there and that what they were expecting out of the software was also there. It was a safe way to begin and it's starting to pay off."

"At the moment, artists are having to work closely with coders to try and solve this animation issue," Gaubil explains. "The bottleneck is the interface between art packages and the game engine. Only Autodesk can solve this problem."

But he's looking beyond the short-term to consider the sort of future technology Autodesk will be able to create thanks to its financial muscle and sales teams. "The middleware market is changing fast. The industry desperately needs stable, longterm player who can offer cross-platform products. That's what we aim to provide," he predicts.

Hoffman also sees the current consolidation as a signifier of widespread change. "Not only are we seeing a blurring between industries such as games, films and design in terms of the tools that are being used, but most of the game facilities we're talking to would prefer to buy their technology off-the-shelf."



Autodesk

kynogon

Maya
REAL TIME SDK

Top: While the Kynogon deal made the headlines, Autodesk also announced Maya 2008 Ex 2 at GDC

Middle: As part of Autodesk, Kynogon will spearhead the new game technology division

Bottom: Back in the days of Alias, there was a push to make Maya real-time. Here's the proof.

More Maya for less

While Autodesk gears up for an assault on the middleware market, it's business as usual in terms of its stalwart 3D packages. Maya 2008 Extension 2 is now available for subscription customers, featuring new modelling features such as preselection highlighting, a tweak mode, and soft selection for the translate, rotate and scale tools. The Maya Muscle system is also updated with new deformers, better skinning and a new smart collisions toolset, while the UV workflow has been enhanced. More prosaically, there's also a new subscription model for Maya Complete, which is more in line with that offered 3ds Max. Priced at $595, it provides you with software extensions, new releases and access to the knowledge base, downloadable tutorials and podcasts, albeit without the SDK support and individual technical support of the gold support option. The price of Maya Unlimited has also been cut from $6,995 to $4,995."There were a lot of customers telling us they wanted to work with Unlimited but because they only needed the nCloth system so they couldn't justify the cost, but everyone seems happy now," explains Rob Hoffman.

HAPTICDEVICES

The power of

Despite looking rather peculiar, in the right hands haptic devices can be powerful tools when it comes improving artists' workflow efficiency …

It's almost guaranteed that at any gaming expo there will be companies offering at what at first sight appear to be Heath Robinson contraptions involving powered levers and flashing lights.

They will, of course, be attempting to replace the tried-and-tested mouse or game pad as a control interface. And rightly so – if the Wii's taught us anything it's that the human-machine interface is the vital part of a computer-based experience.

Sadly, the added precision required when it comes to professional haptic devices seems to rule out the random 'waving your arms around approach', but there are companies trying to bridge the gap between the Wii remote and simple mouse. Most well known is 3Dconnexion, which has been offering its beautifully crafted devices for seven years, and as impressive is the support for industry-standard modelling packages.

More specialised approaches include Sensable's Phantom Omni, while InterSense's IS-900 MicroTrax mixes 3D control with head tracking to provide custom solutions in terms of information management. But perhaps the prosumer/gaming space occupied by Sandio and Novint provide the most interesting potential, although the lack of robust support for modelling packages will be have to be rectified before they can hope to make any inroads.

3DCONNEXION

TECHNOLOGY
SpacePilot, SpaceExplorer, SpaceNavigator, SpaceTraveler

SUPPORTED OS
Linux, Windows

SUPPORTED APPLICATIONS
3ds Max, Acrobat, Maya, Photoshop, SketchUp, XSI

PRICE
from $59 - $399

CONTACT
+44 1322 427 849

The range of 3Dconnexion devices

www.3dconnexion.com

A Logitech division, 3Dconnexion offers a range of ergonomic human-computer interface devices. At the top end sits the SpacePilot, which combines the characteristic controller cap with 21 programmable keys, a LCD screen and automatic program detection. Next is the SpaceExplorer, which has 15 keys but no LCD. The final devices are the two key SpaceNavigator (the only one to support Mac OS X) and its eight key lightweight SpaceTraveler companion.

SENSABLE

TECHNOLOGY
Phantom Omni

SUPPORTED OS
Windows

SUPPORTED APPLICATIONS
3ds Max, Maya, Rhino

PRICE
£2,990 (device & software)

CONTACT
+1 781 937 8315

Phantom Omni handles teeth and normal maps

www.sensable.com

It's a telling mark of how fluid the haptic device market is – since its debut at GDC07, Sensable has moved away from the content creation market to launch a Dental Lab System. Indeed, instead of attending GDC08, the company was at the midwinter meeting of the Chicago Dental Society. Nevertheless, its Phantom Omni device, combined with the company's ClayTools modelling system is ideal for creating high resolution normal maps.

SANDIO

TECHNOLOGY
3D Game O2

SUPPORTED OS
Windows

SUPPORTED APPLICATIONS
3ds Max, Google Earth, Maya, SketchUp, Virtual Earth

PRICE
$80

CONTACT
+1 408 998 0800

The Sandio 3D Game O2 has three joysticks

www.sandiotech.com

Sure, it might be more of a gaming technology than a solid production device but, nevertheless, Sandio's six degrees of freedom Game O2 mouse features three joysticks to provide you with the ability to seamlessly manipulate objects about the X, Y, and Z axes.

A SDK enables support for custom packages to be created, while the mouse also enables 16 commands to be triggered using the programmable buttons.

touch

NOVINT

TECHNOLOGY
Novint Falcon
SUPPORTED OS
Windows
SUPPORTED APPLICATIONS
TBC
PRICE
$200
CONTACT
+1 866 298 4420

Novint Falcon is designed for games and beyond

www.novint.com

Like Sandio's 3D mouse, the Novint Falcon force feedback device was designed primarily as a gaming device, but the company's Advanced Products Group is looking how to apply the technology to other markets and an SDK is also available for custom integration. As for the device itself, it's designed to have different grips attached to the powered haptic device for different games and applications. *Portal* fans will also appreciate its slightly GlaDOS-esque looks.

INTERSENSE

TECHNOLOGY
IS-900 MicroTrax
SUPPORTED OS
N/A
SUPPORTED APPLICATIONS
N/A
INTEGRATION WITH
N/A
PRICE
N/A
CONTACT
+1 781 541 6330

InterSense's MicroTrax mixes 6DOF with head tracking

www.intersense.com

Unlike the other haptic devices covered in this round-up, InterSense's IS-900 MicroTrax is a significantly different affair, seeing as it combines a wireless head tracker with a six degrees-of-freedom wand to enable precision tracking in terms of stereo-based immersive display applications.

It's therefore not something likely to be used by artists, but it does demonstrate the potential of this technology in terms of information management and organisation.

Technical Production Managers

by David Jefferies

Black Rock Studio

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES all studios eventually face is how to keep the lead programmers effective as the size of the coding team grows.

With a small team of two or three programmers, he or she is quite happy coding, managing the architecture of the game and mentoring the junior coders. Then, as the team size grows to six or seven, it becomes more and more difficult to effectively manage and to code at the same time.

And it can get worse, a lot worse, at one point a few years ago we had one lead programmer supervising 20 coders. Uh-uh. That doesn't work. Lesson learnt.

Microsoft has a rule that it takes a day out of the week to manage each programmer that the lead has to support. So as soon as you hit five reports, your week is filled and you can no longer contribute as a programmer.

We spent a lot of time re-organising our code team to fit that model. We created more lead programmer positions, none of them has more than five reports, and they're only scheduled for as much coding time as fits the formula – i.e. if they have four reports then they are scheduled for one day of coding a week.

> ***"Microsoft has a rule that it takes a day out of the week to manage each programmer that the lead has to support..."***

And here's the snag. Before long, your lead programmers spend all their time managing their coders, dealing with personnel issues, performance reviews and sitting in meetings. Your most experienced programmers are no longer directly contributing to the codebase. They get frustrated and a little rusty.

So what's the solution?

Well, not surprisingly we're not the first people to ever come across this problem. Microsoft has been dealing with it for years and we've tailored their solution for the games industry.

We've been experimenting with pairing up our lead programmers with a technical production manager (TPM). The lead programmer works on the critical components of the game while the TPM provides everything that is needed at the right time. The TPM handles the administration and communication, with leads and peers providing input. This frees up the lead to focus on architecture, quality and mentorship while the TPM acts as the information gatherer and productivity driver. A separation of Church and State, that tension is important.

The problem is that these people need to be not only very skilled people managers but also very well versed in the technical side of programming. They're incredibly difficult to find, but they're going to become prized in the game industry.

www.blackrockstudio.com

> 1100000
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> 1100100
> the best studios
> the only guide

develop
100

Develop 100 is published in print
and online in **April.**

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Eidos Interactive licences Unreal Engine 3 for Highlander game

Eidos is developing Highlander for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC using Unreal Engine 3

Eidos recently announced *Highlander* for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC. The game is an extension of the popular *Highlander* movie and TV series that tells the tale of an immortal swordsman, Owen MacLeod. Written by David Abramowitz, the *Highlander* TV series' writer and show runner, *Highlander* takes MacLeod on a journey across multiple lands from first century fiery Pompeii to futuristic New York.

Scheduled for a 2008 release, *Highlander* will take advantage of the latest UE3 tools and technology.

NATURALMOTION JOINS EPIC'S INTEGRATED PARTNERS PROGRAM

NaturalMotion and Epic announced an agreement to incorporate Morpheme, the industry's first graphically authorable animation engine for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC, into Unreal Engine 3. Per the agreement, NaturalMotion will join Epic's prestigious Integrated Partners Program (IPP), and its technology will be immediately available to any publishers or developers licensing Unreal Engine 3.

Morpheme builds on the existing Unreal Engine 3 character system by offering unique features for constructing very complex animation setups. Its external tool, Morpheme: connect, enables developers to preview and modify elements in real time through the strategic application of state machines and blend trees.

Like other components of Unreal Engine 3, Morpheme's existing animation nodes can be extended to provide game-specific functions. Future feature sets developed by NaturalMotion will be incorporated into Unreal Engine 3 per the partnership.

"Unreal Engine 3 is already an inspired game design platform, offering much of the bleeding edge technology developers need," said Torsten Reil, CEO of NaturalMotion. "By adding Morpheme to Epic's suite, more studios will be able to take advantage of NaturalMotion's pioneering animation technology, allowing for a whole new generation of games with astonishingly realistic characters and animations."

"With Morpheme, the implementation of character animations can finally be driven by our animators instead of our engineers," added Stephen Palmer, vice president of product development at Gearbox Software.

"The folks at NaturalMotion have recognised that artists need to have more control of this fundamentally artistic process, and have created a world-class animation system and tool-chain to support that."

Latest Enhancements to Unreal Engine 3

In case you missed Epic at the recent Game Developer's Conference in San Francisco, here's the scoop on the latest improvements and features available in Unreal Engine 3.

Epic's engine team has made many performance and memory optimisations to Unreal Engine 3, with a special focus on PlayStation 3, in addition to adding dynamic ambient occlusion, a crowd system and a fracturing tool and runtime.

Epic has also upgraded the engine's build process, content pipeline and profiling tools, as well as security-related features for shipping PC games. The Unreal Editor has been polished considerably, with particular attention to Matinee cinematic tools.

Lastly, Epic has built into Unreal Engine 3 notable character lighting and shadowing enhancements, support for distributed cooking, DirectX 10 support, as well as 32-bit and 64-bit ActorX support for the latest versions of 3ds Max, Maya and XSI.

UE3 wins Best Engine prize

UE3 has won the Frontline Award for Best Engine for the third year in a row. Epic would like to thank our customers for shipping such great, award-winning titles, and we look forward to offering the best possible cross-platform game engine for years to come.

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

E3 2008
Los Angeles, CA
July 15-17, 2008

Please email:
mrein@epicgames.com
for appointments.

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' Unreal Engine, contact:
mrein@epicgames.com

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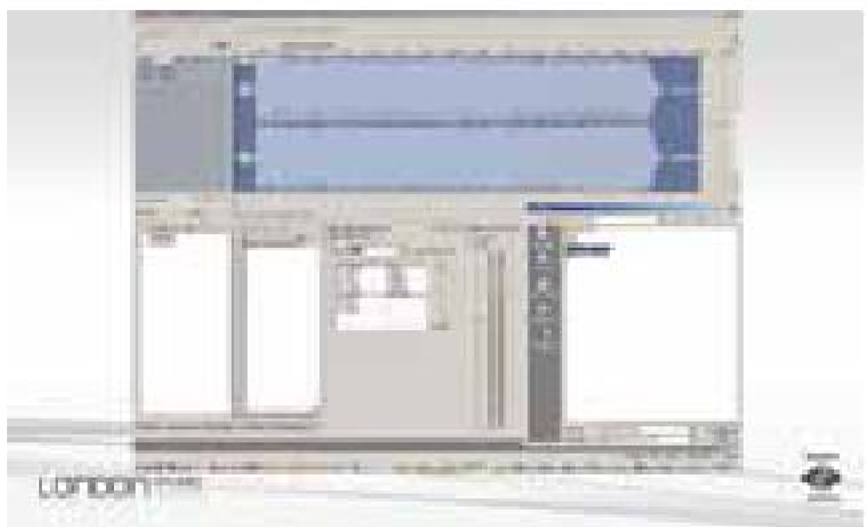
www.epicgames.com/epic_jobs.html

Mark Rein *is vice president of Epic Games based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1992 Mark has worked on Epic's licensing and publishing deals, business development, public relations, academic relations, marketing and business operations.*

HEARDABOUT

SingStar

John Broomhall talks to SCEE London Studio's audio manager Dan Bardino about the production of the latest in Sony's singing game franchise…



FORMATS: PlayStation 3
DEVELOPER: SCEE London Studio
PUBLISHER: SCEE

AUDIO TEAM: Dan Bardino *(London Studio audio manager)*,
Lauri Sarkka *(senior audio programmer, SingStar)*,
Richard Griffiths *(principle audio programmer, SCEE Advanced Technology Group)*,
Stephen O'Callaghan *(sound design)*,
Jim Fowler *(menu music composer / music content manager, Singstar)*,
Alastair Lindsay *(music manager/5.1 mix engineer - menu music)*,
Rik Ede *(surround upmix process and engineering)*

With professional quality plug-ins, superior vocal suppression and sophisticated surround upmixing, *SingStar*'s audio technology and production processes have hit the high notes.

At the early stages of the game's migration from PS2 to PS3, Dan Bardino was impressed and inspired by the team's proposals. He explains: "The plans were ambitious and extremely 'next-gen' – a whole new visual aesthetic and flow. My *SingStar* Online promised a social network-style community where users could upload their own performances and SingStore would provide a seamless online shopping experience built into the game itself with frequently updated content. I was blown away and knew the audio had to be stunning."

Bardino and his team set about re-thinking internal processes and methodology, soon deciding to look beyond their own shores within the Sony empire. He says: "Fortunately, Sony has various fingers in various pro-audio pies, including the Sound Forge crew.

"The end result was cherry-picking their VST plug-ins and adapting them to run natively on PS3, optimised for the SPU media processors. We now have truly professional vocal production techniques running real-time. The vocal signal chain includes a high pass filter, the wave hammer compressor (5:1 ratio, threshold of minus 16dB plus automatic gain control), and then Sound Forge's great sounding reverb.

"Settings are tweaked for the *SingStar* microphone and we have to be fairly heavy handed with processing – we don't have studio control. People's lounges are noisy, the microphone's passed around and there's a huge variance in volume input. We aim to make the quiet audible and the loud not too loud, with no distortion.

> ***"TV talent shows clearly demonstrate people's misguided perception of their own voice…"***
>
> ***Dan Bardino, SCEE***

"TV talent show auditions clearly demonstrate people's misguided perception of their own voice so providing a menu of choices for the input is not really workable – it has to be automatic. Therefore, we prescribe 'input' reverb settings to help sit the vocal down in the mix – a kind of catch-all warm space with 1.2 second decay but, on playback, allow the player control. They can use pitch shifting, wobbling chorus and cavernous reverb to make themselves sound bonkers if they want!

"The qualitative difference of the pro quality plug-ins isn't always easily explicable to non-audio people. However, one useful yardstick is consistent consumer feedback that the microphones sound so much better, when they are basically the same as for PS2."

A highly significant aspect of production is ADRes technology, designed by Dr Dan Barry of the Dublin Institute of Technology, which allows isolation of instruments in a stereo mix. As soon as SCEE's audio technology manager Jason Page drew attention to it, Bardino started thinking about vocal suppression. After proving it could work real-time, an exclusive licensing deal ensued.

"We soon had it running natively on PS3, isolating and pretty much removing the vocal," explains Bardino. "Exactly how it works is confidential, but I can say that as well as filtering frequencies it also works on stereo width and position.

"The authoring ADRes settings vary from record to record, our aim being to push the original vocal back enough in the mix so that the user stands out more. Sometimes you're left with the reverb of the original vocal; sometimes it appears to be gone altogether. So far, we're hitting an 80 per cent success rate. It's very, very good."

The team's previous methodology was gathering multi-tracks of *SingStar* songs from around the world and re-creating each record's final mix (minus the vocals) – fascinating and enjoyable but also a cumbersome and unpredictable process. The commercial value of the ADRes tech to the overall production path and pipeline speaks for itself by comparison – now a stereo master can be used, an approach also extending to creating surround versions, working with Rik Ede. According to Bardino, Ede's patented upmix techniques are "so clever, they sound like the whole track's been re-engineered in 5.1 from the original stems."

So, how does Bardino reflect on the project overall? "Obviously it was vital the audio would be as 'next-gen' as those wonderful visuals – and I'm happy we've done both in terms of quality and pipeline. Beyond this, I guess this title has really woken me up to user generated audio content as a growing phenomenon – especially with titles like Home coming along. How we manage it technically is a serious issue.

"With *SingStar*, our approach is to balance creative freedom with technical control – funnelling the audio into the shape we need it technically without spoiling it. More and more user generated audio content is a scary prospect but *SingStar*'s been a perfect head start."

John Broomhall is an independent audio director, consultant and content provider
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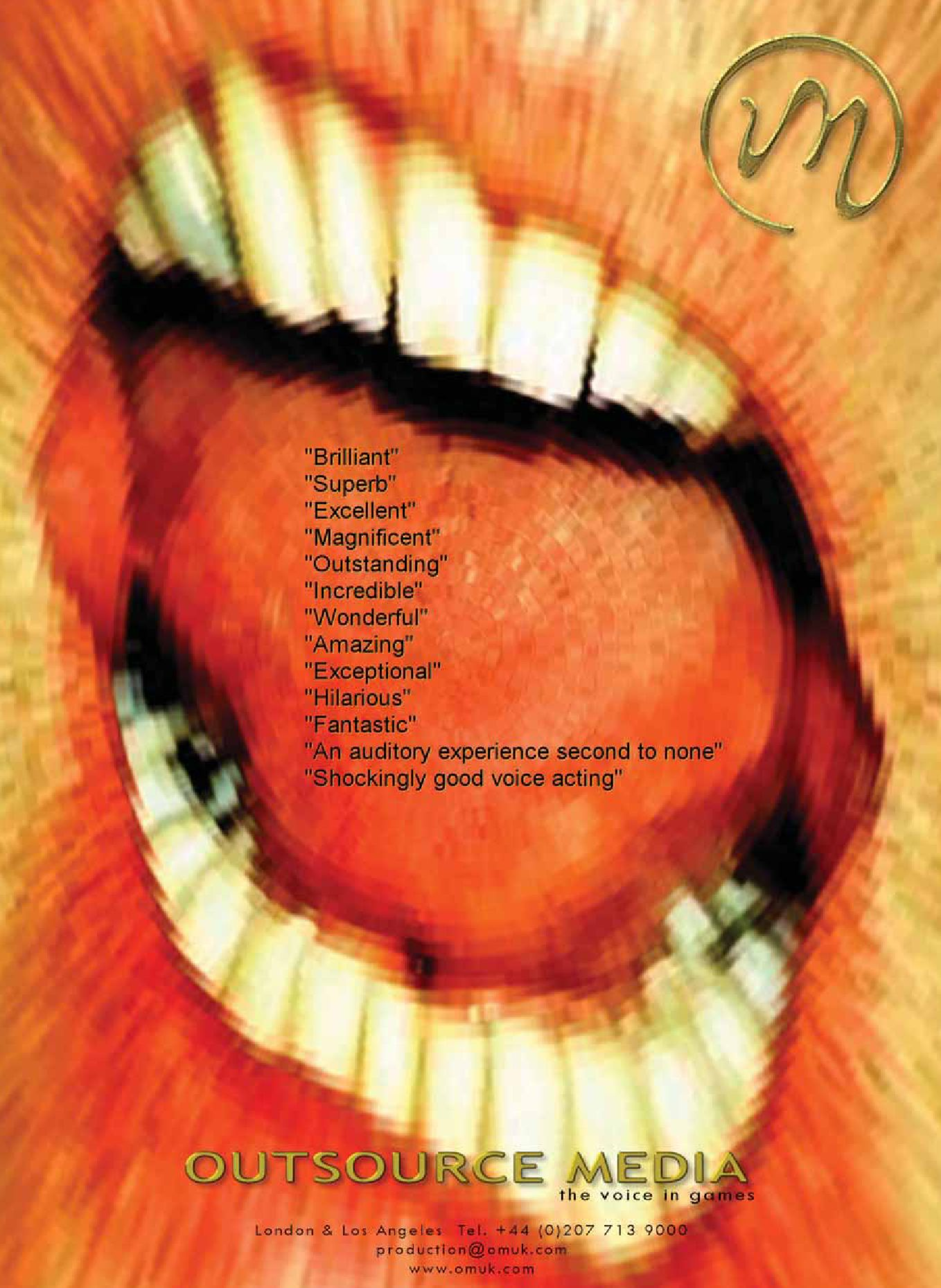
www.johnbroomhall.co.uk



"Brilliant"
"Superb"
"Excellent"
"Magnificent"
"Outstanding"
"Incredible"
"Wonderful"
"Amazing"
"Exceptional"
"Hilarious"
"Fantastic"
"An auditory experience second to none"
"Shockingly good voice acting"

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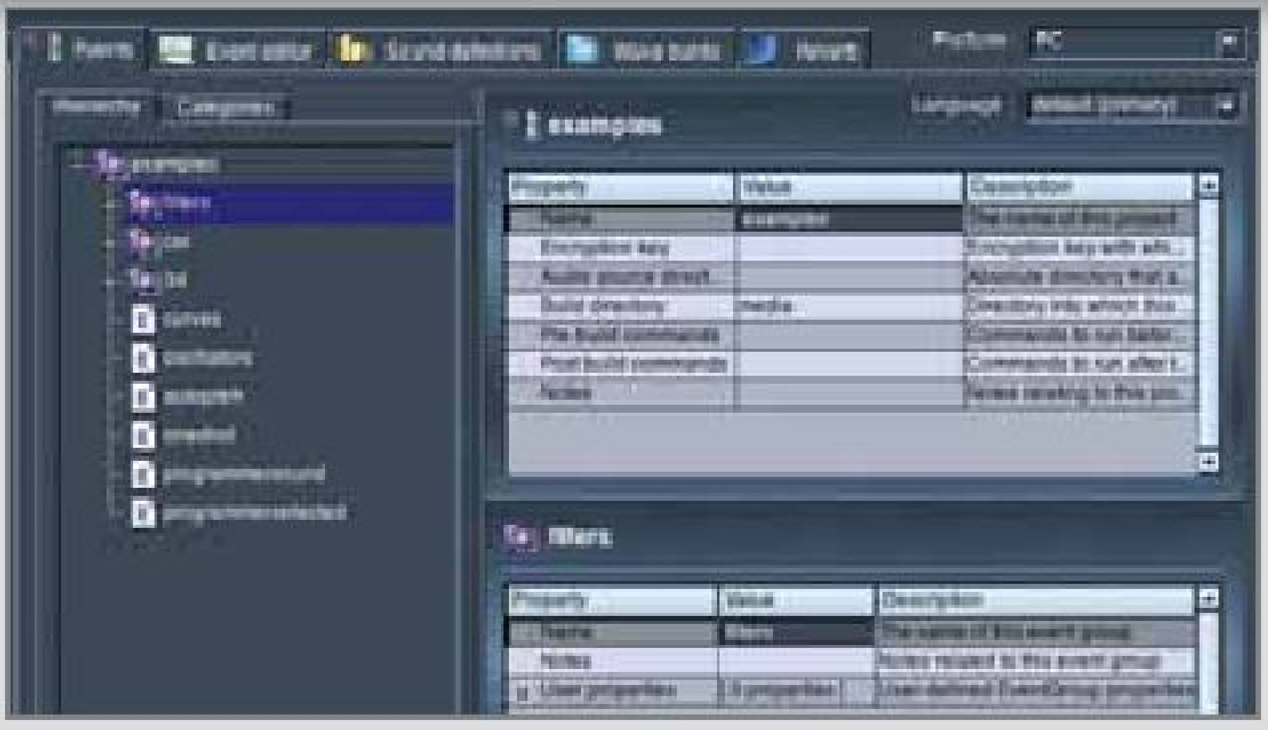
Sound for a pound

Not got the time or, perhaps more importantly, the funds to build your own audio engine? **Ed Fear** takes a look at the prominent audio middleware on the market...

Not every studio has the resources to dedicate several members of staff to the development of a bespoke audio engine for their latest game – especially when it's easy to dismiss the multi-layered intricacies of top-notch audio as being too grand for your project. But with flexible licensing agreements available for smaller-scale XBLA, PSN or WiiWare projects, and even free versions of some available for hobbyist or independent developers, with the right audio middleware every game can sound as good as it looks.

But which one is the right one for you? We've rounded up the four leading audio engines from across the world to give you a quick overview of each one's particular strengths.

FMOD



The ever-popular FMOD continues to woo developers of the hottest triple-A titles, thanks to its big feature list and what Firelight proudly claims as an 'actively developed' toolkit, boasting monthly major releases to enable a quick turnaround of new features specified by clients.

FMOD's API provides a DSP audio engine with high-end features such as 2D and 3D morphing, 3D reverb support and a choice of a low-level API or a data-based equivalent, with performance tuned for each platform.

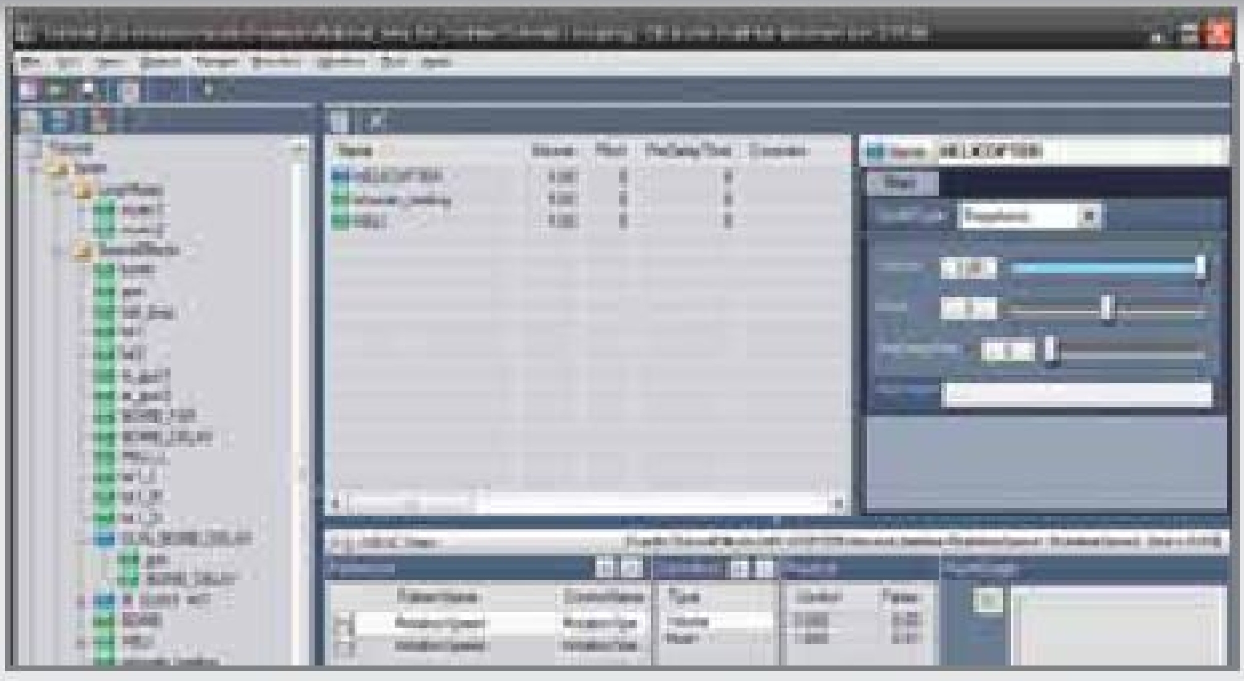
The second half of the FMOD experience is the FMOD Designer, which gives the power of the system to the sound designer, granting them the ability to completely design the in-game audio seperately and simply provide programmers with assets and an event list, turning sound implementation into a much more efficient data-driven system.

The latest version of the FMOD runtime adds PS3 support for DTS output, oscillators and spectrum analysis, alongside optimizations for reverb on PS3 and Xbox 360 and added API functionality, while the new 1.13 version of the FMOD Designer adds interactive music functionality, integration of the standalone low-level FMOD profiler and a new message log panel.

FMOD is available for all contemporary and last-gen consoles, with a range of licences available scaling from free for non-commercial games to reduced rates for Xbox Live Arcade, PSN or WiiWare titles.

www.fmod.org

CRI Audio



CRI's latest audio engine is a next-gen cross-platform audio engine for PS3, Xbox 360, PC and Wii, and promises the exact same output on each platform.

The real draw is that the tech is a full audio pipeline – the powerful tool suite gives sound designers the ability to design interactive and intelligent random sounds such as footsteps and gunfire to avoid repetition, in a format that can quickly be taken and manipulated by programmers based on real-time factors.

The runtime is optimised to all of the target platforms – on the PS3, digital signal processing is carried out on an SPU; a hundred simultaneous sounds can be processed on a single Xbox 360 CPU core; and the Wii version takes advantage of the native hardware acceleration.

Finally, being based on CRI's hugely popular ADX middleware brings with it comprehensive streaming and buffering support even while other level assets are being loaded.

The company also offers a DS-tailored audio engine, CRI Vibe, a streaming audio toolkit based again on its ADX audio-compression codec. The tool can compress to an extent that up to nine hours of compressed data can be stored on a 512Mbit DS cartridge, at a compression rate better than the stock DS codec. Not only does this compression mean that more can be stored on a cart, it also means that games can be shrunk to fit on smaller capacity cards, thereby reducing production costs.

www.cri-mw.com

WWise

Audiokinetic's cross-platform audio system Wwise – currently available on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC and Wii – has been designed for use by sound designers and audio programmers, decoupling the two professions and allowing them to work separately while also facilitating the process of linking them up where necessary.

The unified authoring application gives full control to the sound designer, allowing them to author and organise sounds visually and control blends between interactive music segments. The latest version also boasts the new Dynamic Dialogue system, a lightweight and efficient schema of user-defined rules for building and managing dynamic speech. This allows the user to utilise sample-accurate dialogue stitching to build a huge range of speech, including play-by-play commentary.

New to the Wwise product family is Wwise Motion, which gives the audio designer power over PC vibration peripherals and Wii, PS3 and Xbox 360 controllers. The product is designed to free programmers from having to worry about rumble, traditionally left to the last minute, thereby allowing them work on more pressing issues.

Requiring only a single extra line of code and virtually no CPU overhead, Motion can generate vibration patterns automatically from sound data or, if more control is desired, be authored graphically within the Wwise application.

Like some of the other audio engines featured here, Wwise licences come in a variety of flavours, including a reduced flat-fee for digital download titles or a royalty rate of only $0.10 per copy sold.
www.audiokinetic.com

irrKlang

Although its monicker might suggest an extension to the popular Irrlicht open source 3D engine, Austrian team Ambiera's irrKlang merely takes structural inspiration from the popular game tech, priding itself on being a fully-independent and feature-packed audio engine for Windows, Mac and Linux systems.

Free for non-commerical use, with very reasonable commercial licences available complete with support and source code, irrKlang supports a wide range of audio formats – from the ubiquitous WAV, MP3 and OGG to more specialist formats such as XM, MOD and IT – and is available as both a C++ SDK and a managed API for .NET languages.

The engine features buffered audio playback with automatic resource management and stream/cache determination, dynamic sound effects in 3D such as the Doppler effect in addition to real-time 2D effects such as reverb, echo and distortion. The engine can run on a single thread or in a separate one in multi-processor environments, and has an extensible plug-in architecture for custom functionality.

Optimised for low-end systems, the 3D engine works well even on hardware that couldn't normally use 3D sound buffers without a significant performance hit, supports multiple rolloff models and integrates into Ambiera's irrlicht-focused world editing tool irrEdit for precise three-dimensional sound placement.

The engine is updated roughly once per month, and licensing for irrKlang Pro starts at €65 for a product that sells for less than €14 and scales up to €390 for a single product of any price.
www.ambiera.com/irrklang/

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Studio News

Games development's movers and shakers.
This month: nDreams, Relentless and Rovio grow…

Hampshire-based developer **nDreams** has this month been bolstered by three new recruits to work on its 'exciting new project with Sony'.

Martin Field (*pictured left*) joins the company as a 3D artist and graphic designer, having previously worked at Ideal World Television, and Nick Pendriis (*centre*) will be taking up a game designer role after moving from Jester Interactive. The studio will be getting a new head of audio too, with Chris Nuttall (*right*) joining the company after nine years in charge of game audio at Air Studios and a recent listing in the Observer's '500 Rising Stars' list.
www.ndreams.com

Buzz-masters **Relentless** continues its adolescent growth spurt, gaining another six staff members in the space of a month.

Paul Sumpner joins the developer as senior programmer, having previously worked generating '3D worlds and real-time interactive cutscenes' for companies such as Sony and Ratbag, and has also worked for TV networks BBC, Channel 4, ABC and CNN.

Also jumping into the programming team are vanilla programmer James Rigby, who studied physics at Oxford University before learning C++ in various jobs outside the industry in London and Bristol; junior programmer Adam Mamoany who graduated from university in 2006 and will be working on future *Buzz* video and audio technologies; and fellow junior programmer Dave Weekes, a Sussex graduate with a masters in virtual environments.

Susie Wright joins the studio as senior animator, having worked in TV, film, commercials and on the BAFTA-nominated *Those Scurvy Rascals* before working for games companies such as Computer Artworks and Black Rock, and last but not least Mona Quintanilla has taken up the role of assistant producer after stints at QA and localisation project management at Babel and QA and live operations management across multiple titles at NCsoft.

Andrew Eades, development director of Relentless Software said: "We're conscious that to continue making great social games we need to employ a mix of industry experience and creativity with talent from outside of games – not only does this ensure that the industry continues to grow, and we don't keep poaching from each other, but it also gives us a broader creative perspective internally."
www.relentless.co.uk

Finnish mobile and handheld game developer **Rovio** has seen its roster grow by another three new recruits. Liz Lehtonen takes up the role as junior game designer, having completed her MA in New Media at the Helsinki University of Art and Design's Media Lab, and Harro Grönberg joins as a producer. Taina Myöhänen will assume the role of head of studio, previously project manager at the Virtual Air Guitar Company and Redlynx, where he worked on *Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command* on PSP and DS.
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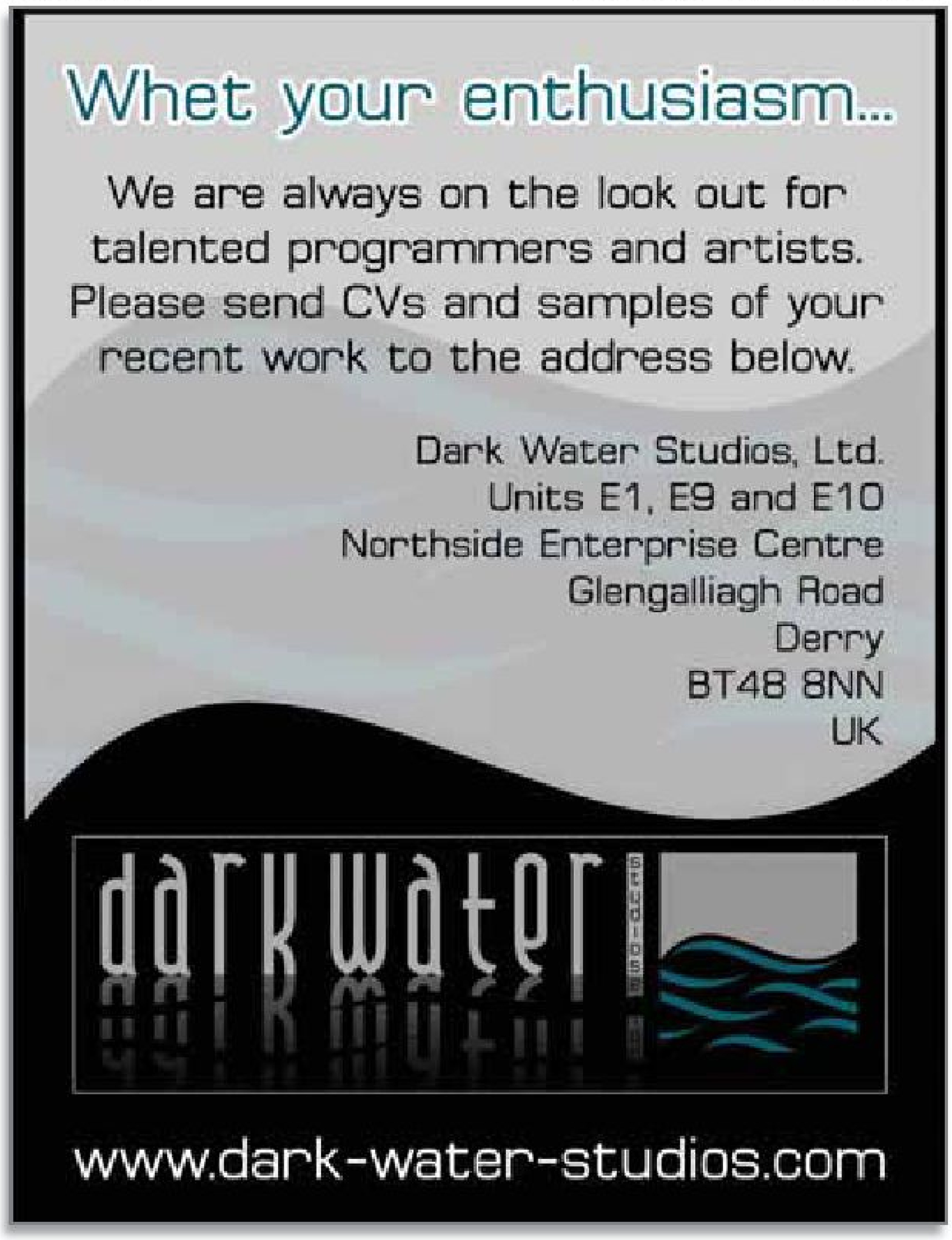

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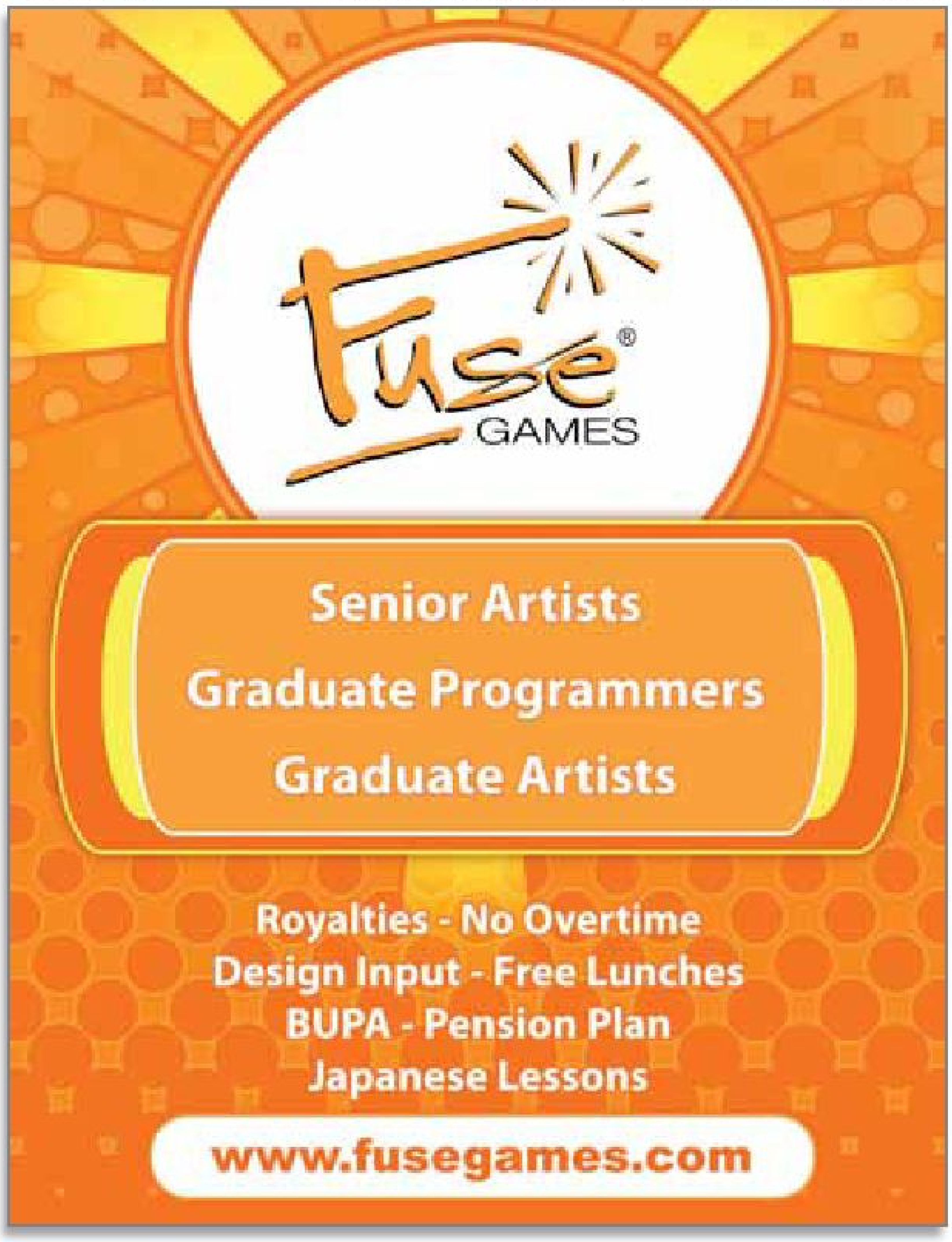

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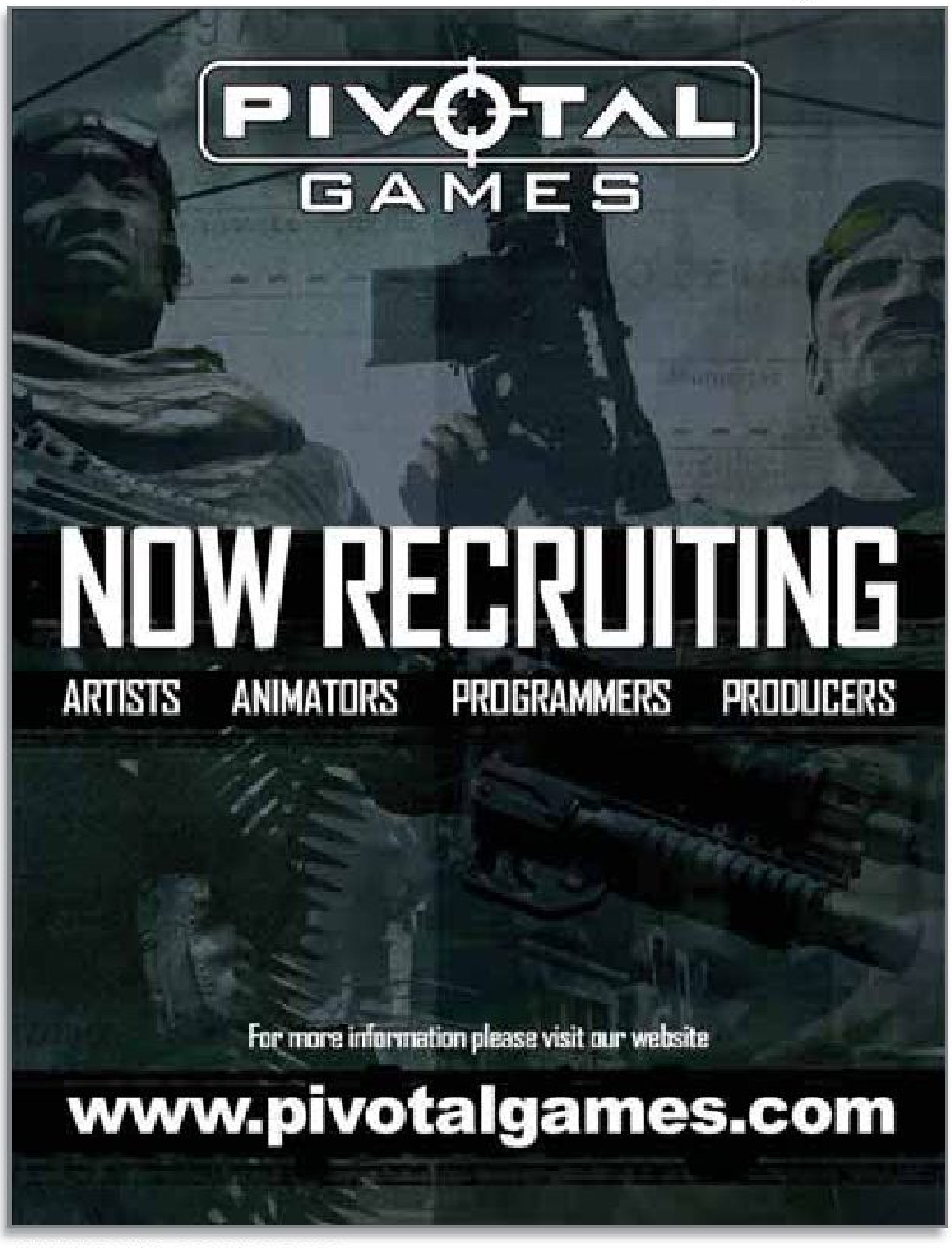

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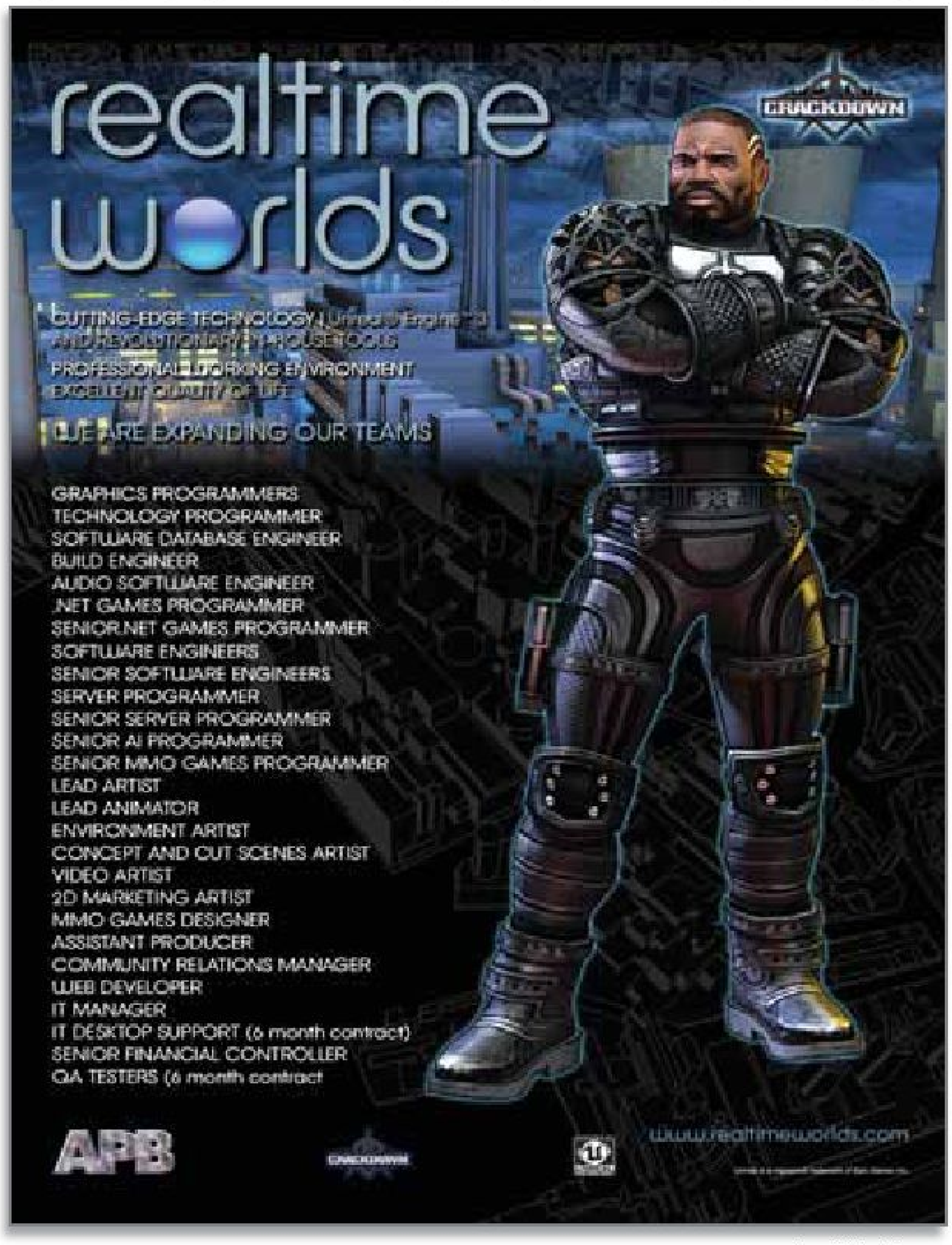

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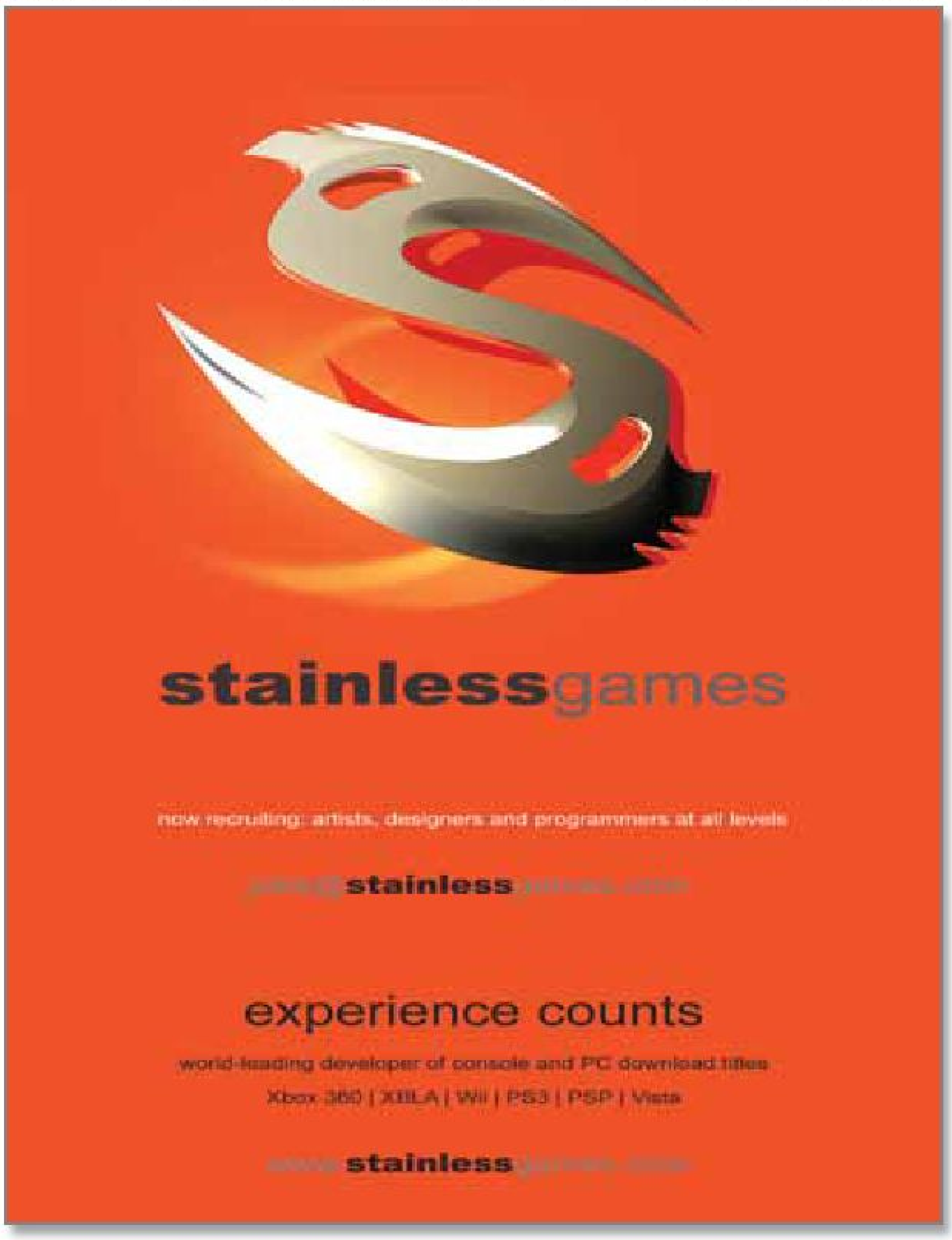

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Tools News

Havok PC goes free

Havok has announced that, starting from May 2008, Havok Complete – which comprises the popular Havok Physics and Animation packages – will be available free of charge for the PC.

The move 'seeks to propel innovative game development' by making technology found in over 200 games available to a wider userbase, specifically 'independent developers, academic institutions and enthusiasts in the PC space.'

"This enables us to make an industry-changing move and opens up a much broader market for products such as Havok Behavior – and our new products Havok Cloth and Havok Destruction – that really come alive when adopted on top of our core platform, Havok Complete," commented David O'Meara, MD at Havok.

The PC version of Havok will be freely available for non-commercial use as a downloadable package from May 2008. Havok has also arranged a deal with its new parent company Intel to offer free commercial licenses to approved game developers.

Havok added that its overall focus is still cross-platform, with its tools for consoles only available commercially, and that the offer is only applicable to PC games.

www.havok.com

HANSOFT WITH GUSTO

Bloxham, Oxfordshire-based independent developer Gusto Games has chosen Hansoft's project management system to standardise and strengthen their existing development process.

"Moving to Hansoft from our previous project management system has been a quiet revolution," commented Struan Robertson, producer at Gusto Games. "Rather than using separate programs for waterfall and agile development, it's allowed us to bring all of our production methodologies under one roof with minimum disruption and learning; if you know about agile development, then you already know how to use Hansoft because it does everything you'd expect and more."

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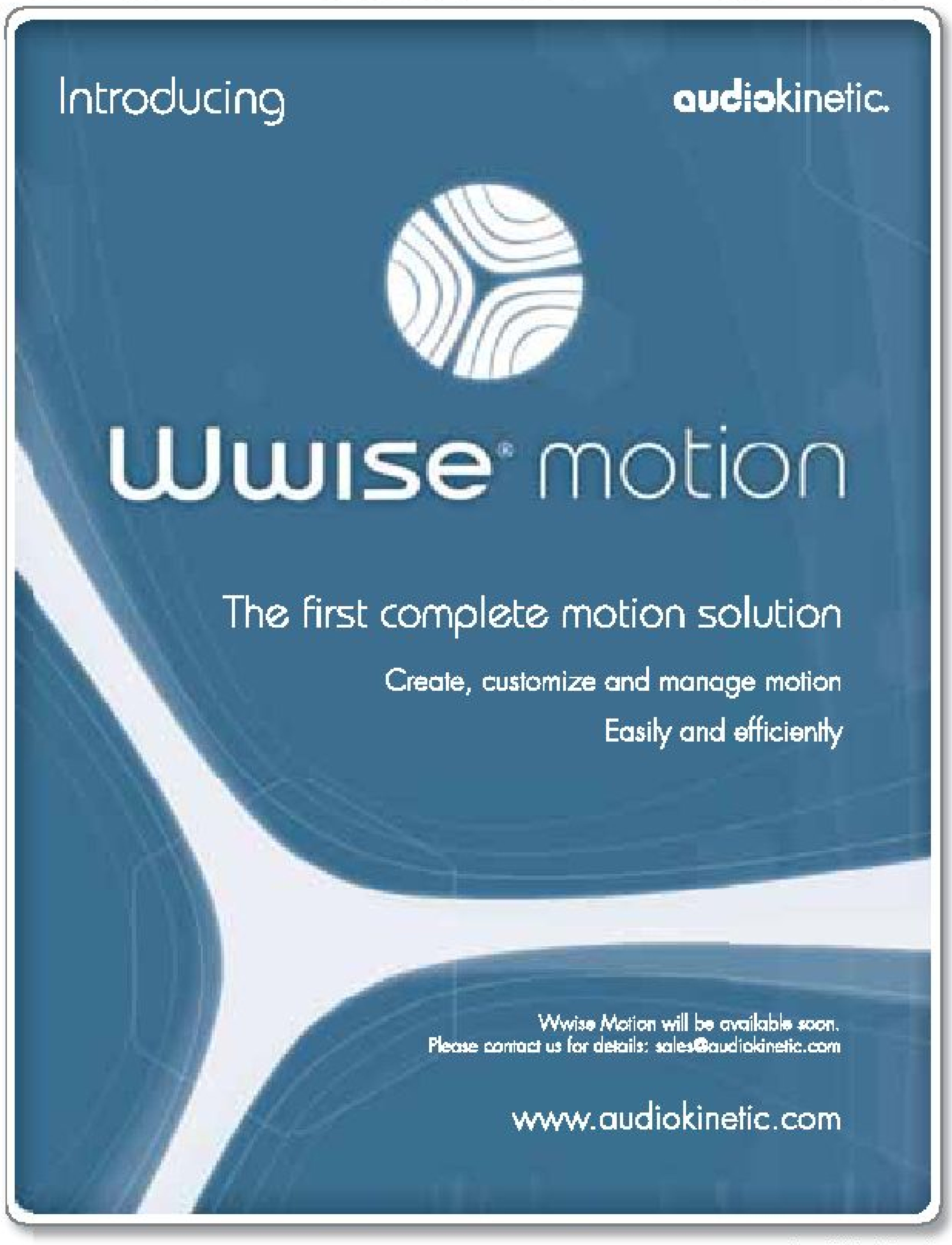
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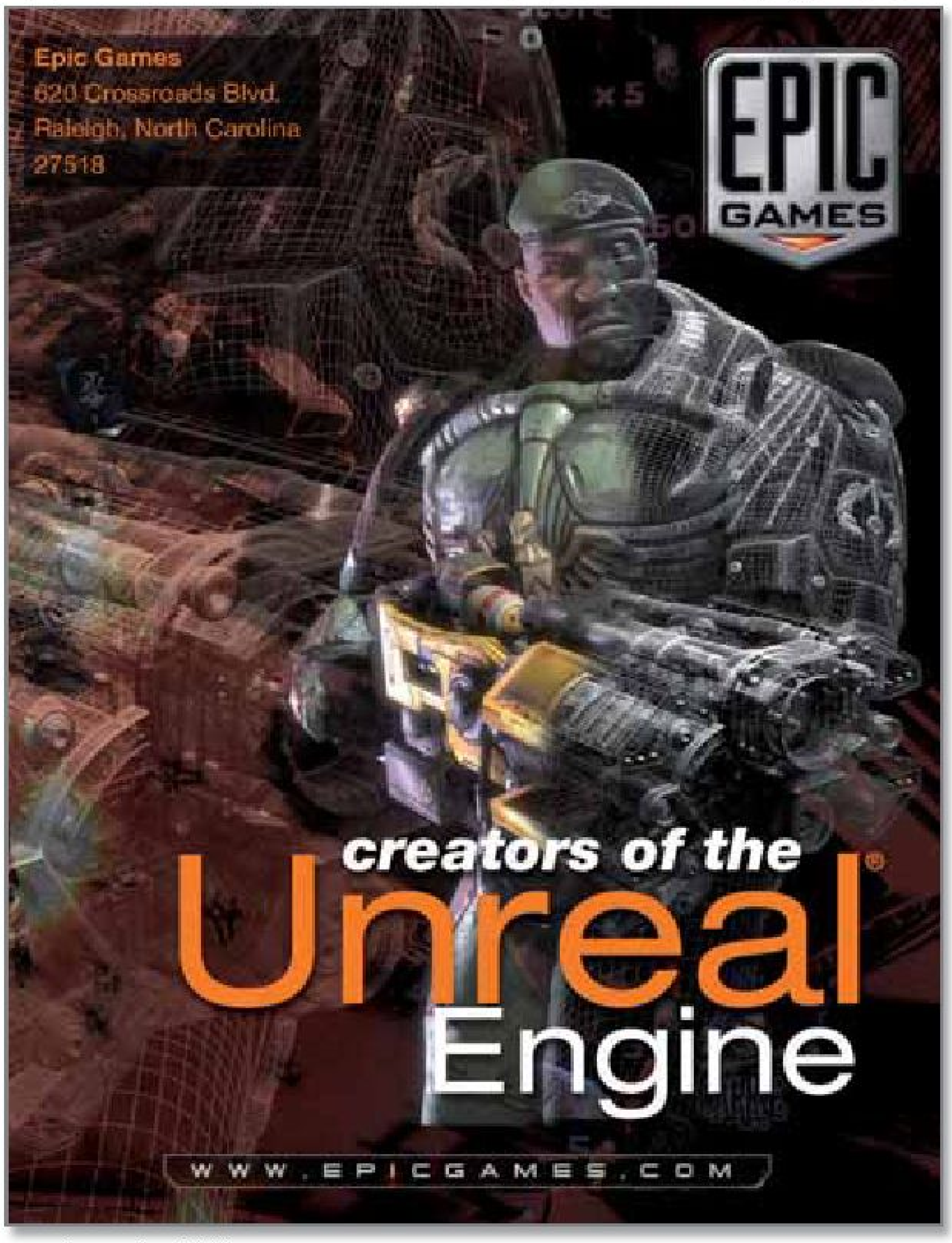

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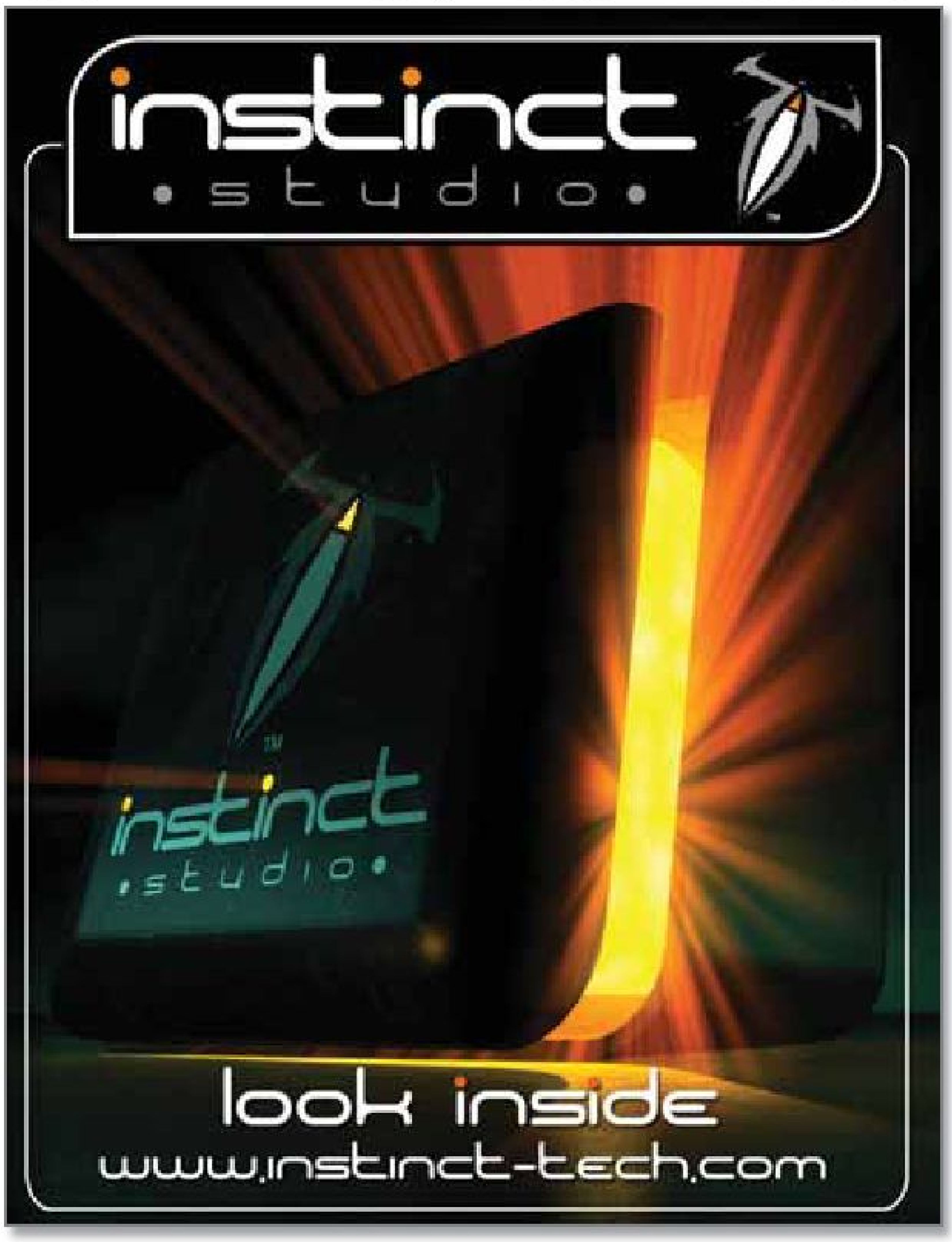
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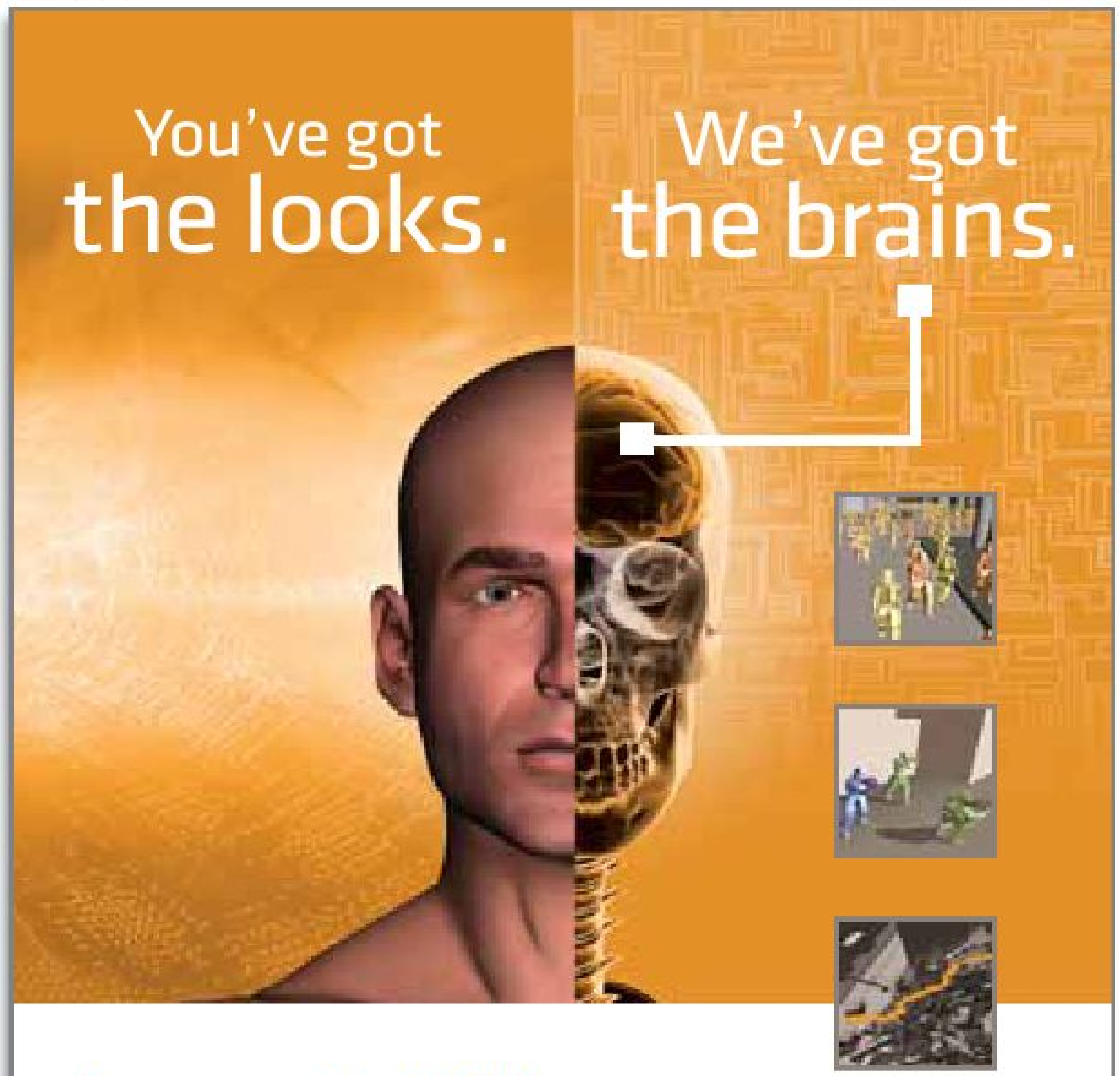
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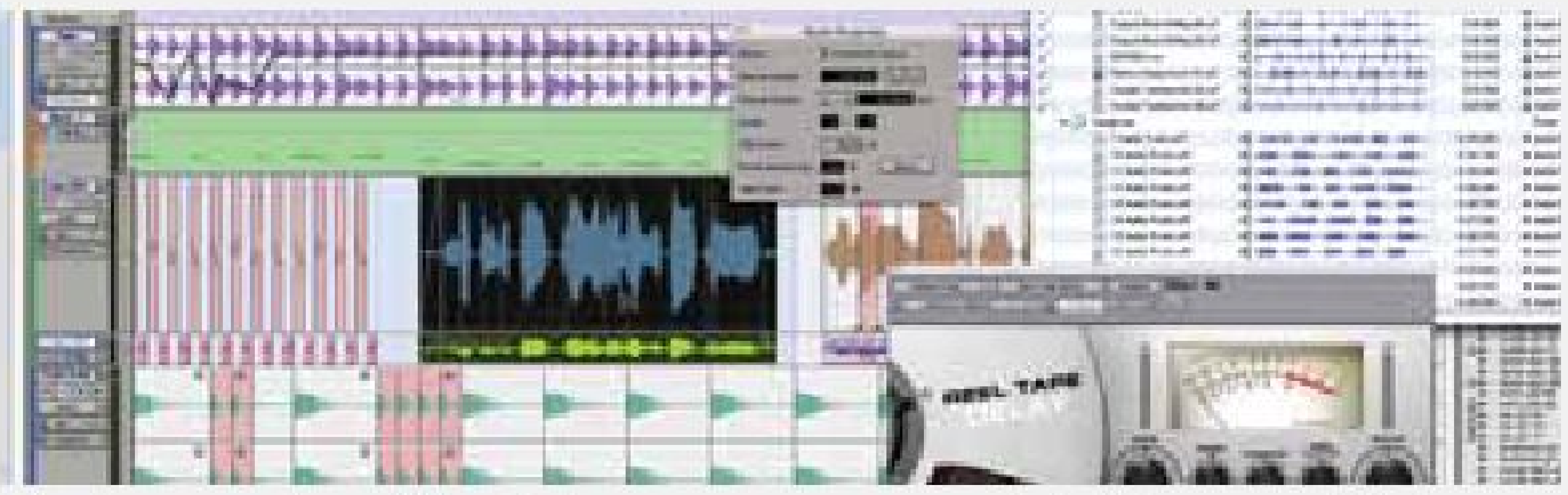

The latest version of Pro Tools – undoubtedly the industry standard tool for pretty much any audio discipline, from the tracking and recording stage through to post-production – brings with it the new 'Elastic Time' feature, which allows users to expand or contract pieces of music by changing tempo on-the-fly. As such, already scored pieces or pre-recorded dialogue could, for example, be adapted to match re-edited cutscene footage.

Other new features include Unicode support, the ability to accept MIDI controller data from ReWire applications and the new Structure Free sample player, which comes packed with almost a gigabyte of samples.

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Services News

Axis and Codemasters at pole position

Codemasters has once again enlisted the help of Scottish animation house Axis Animation to produce a cinematic for *Racedriver: GRID*, its next big racing title.

Directed by Wiek Luijken, the sequence starts with a view of the Earth from space, the cinematic then zooms in to show street racing in San Francisco, Japan and fast-paced nocturnal racing at the Le Mans 24 Hour.

In addition to the difficulty in creating the extreme zooms, the team also had to work with crowds in different distinct environments. They worked with assets from Codemasters to create the landscapes and also created a tool in Houdini allowing them to quickly place crowds by painting directly onto geometry and automating the character placements and animation sequences.

"The best types of clients are the ones that push us to break new ground and advance either creatively or technically," said Luijken. "I feel all of our Codemasters projects have always allowed us to do both."

www.axisanimation.com

BABEL ADDS MMO SERVICES

Babel has announced the formation of a specialist MMO team, headed by company founder and client services director Anthony McGaw.

The company – which already provides QA testing, translation, audio and print services – has begun work on a number of MMO projects from the USA, South East Asia and Europe. Babel boasts a worldwide resource of 350 specialist translators and editors and a test team of over 500 functionality and localisation testers based across offices in Montreal, Brighton and India.

As part of offering an end to end solution for MMO developers, Babel is increasing the size of its Indian facility and expanding into new service lines of outsourced art and customer support.

"You need scale, global delivery and flexibility to provide a credible service for MMOs," said McGaw. "You need large scale functionality testing, online beta capability, the resources to translate two-to-three million word scripts, to cast and record multiple actors and then carry out localization QA on the result. This is our core business."

www.babelmedia.com

GAMEJACKET LAUNCHES

A new British in-game marketing firm is looking to target casual games by offering dynamic advertising in Flash games.

GameJacket bills itself as the first firm to offer an advertising platform for Flash games that can use rich-media adverts using bespoke technology, and says its adshare model means Flash developers can generate revenue from their creations. Because GameJacket-enabled games run from a central server, developers can get comprehensive and accurate statistics from a single source as opposed to collating data from the multitude of different portals.

GameJacket's founder and director of content, Barry White, commented: "Our unique technology provides Flash game developers with a rich toolset, enabling them to manage and protect their intellectual property and distribute their games freely around the internet whilst, at the same time, generate a constant stream of revenue from high value advertisers."

He added: "Uniquely, GameJacket hands developers the power to update their Flash games anytime they choose, regardless of where they are being played on the internet. This 'version control' technology will revolutionise the way Flash games are managed online. Plus, GameJacket is able to share a rich array of statistics empowering developers to analyse and measure the success of their products."

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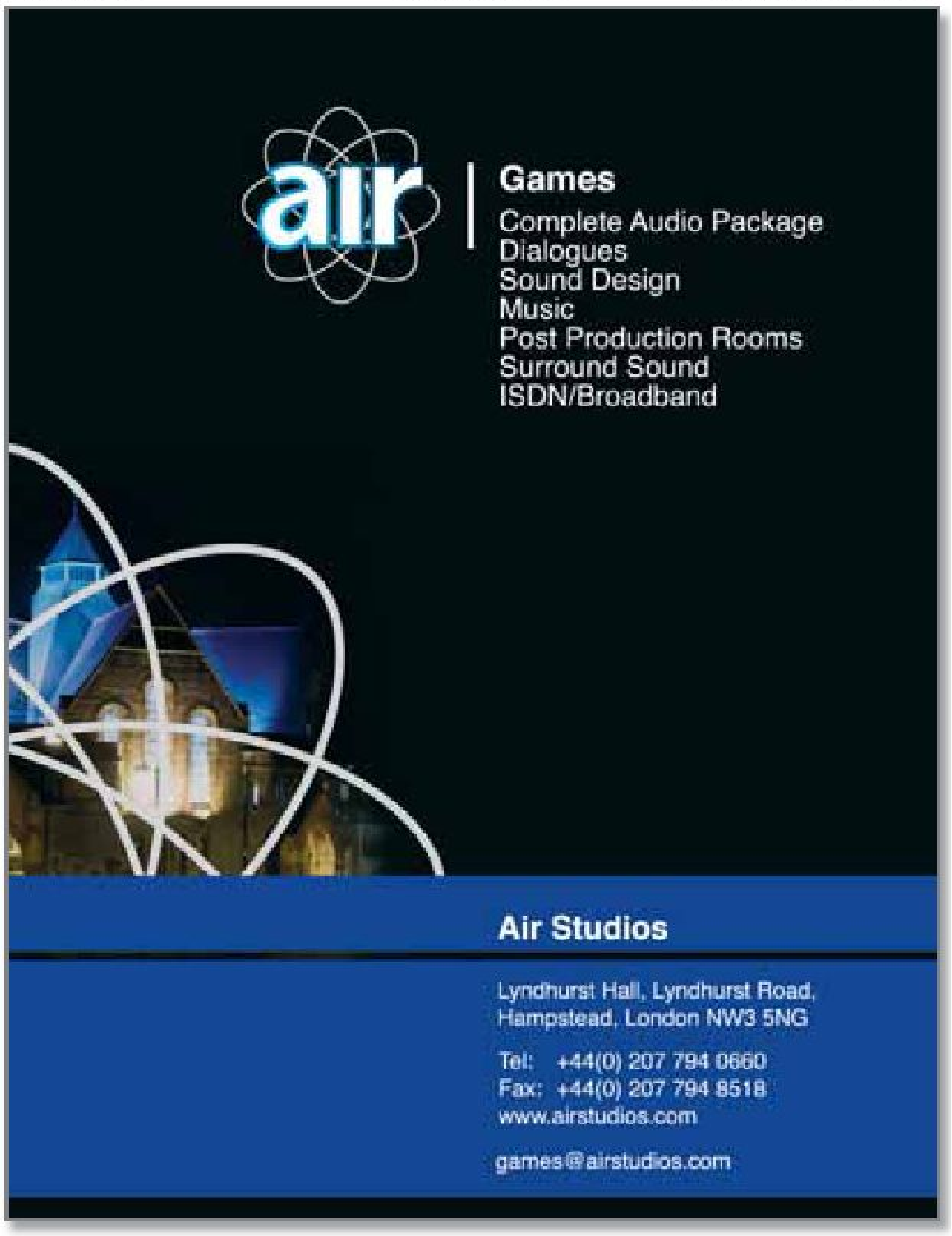

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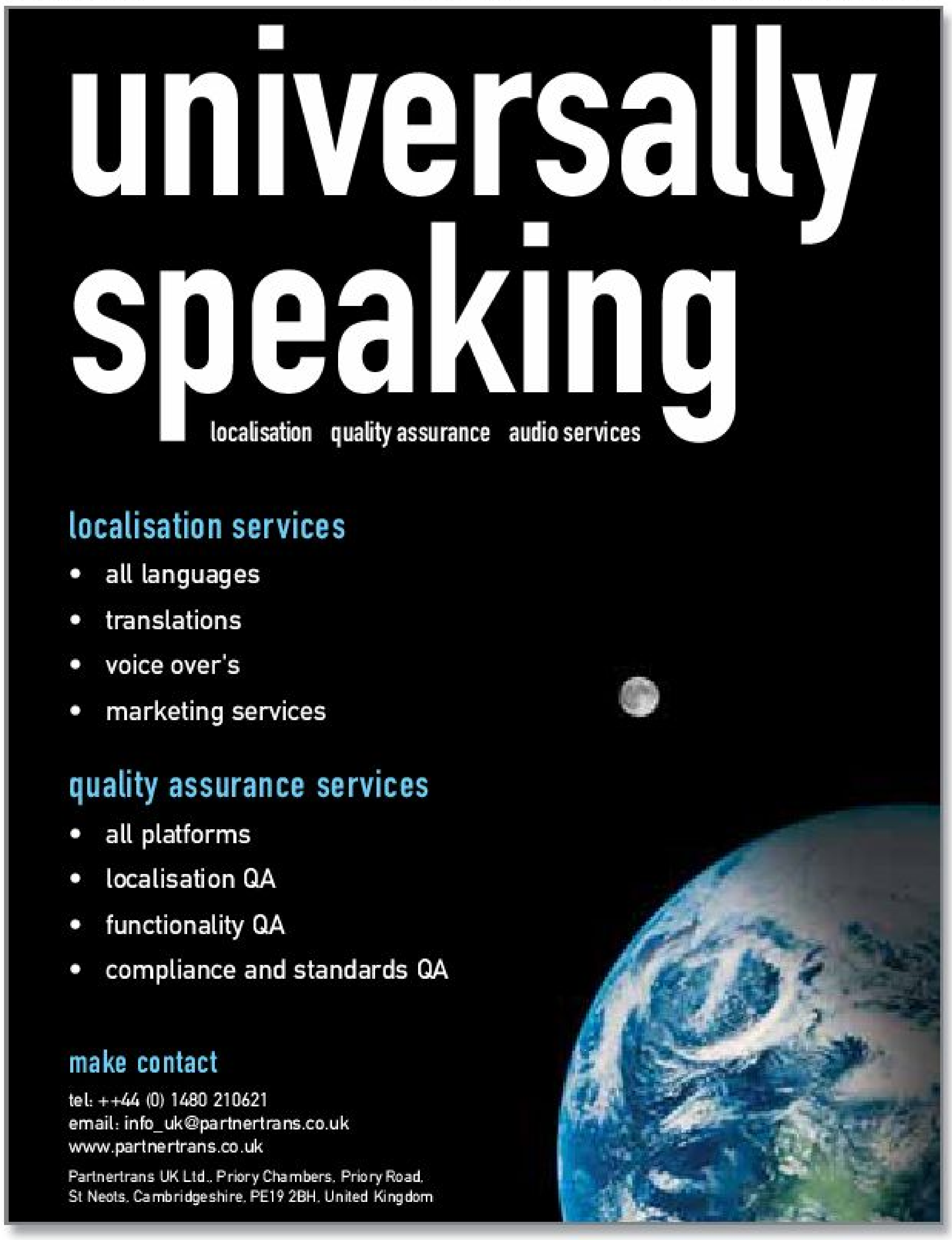

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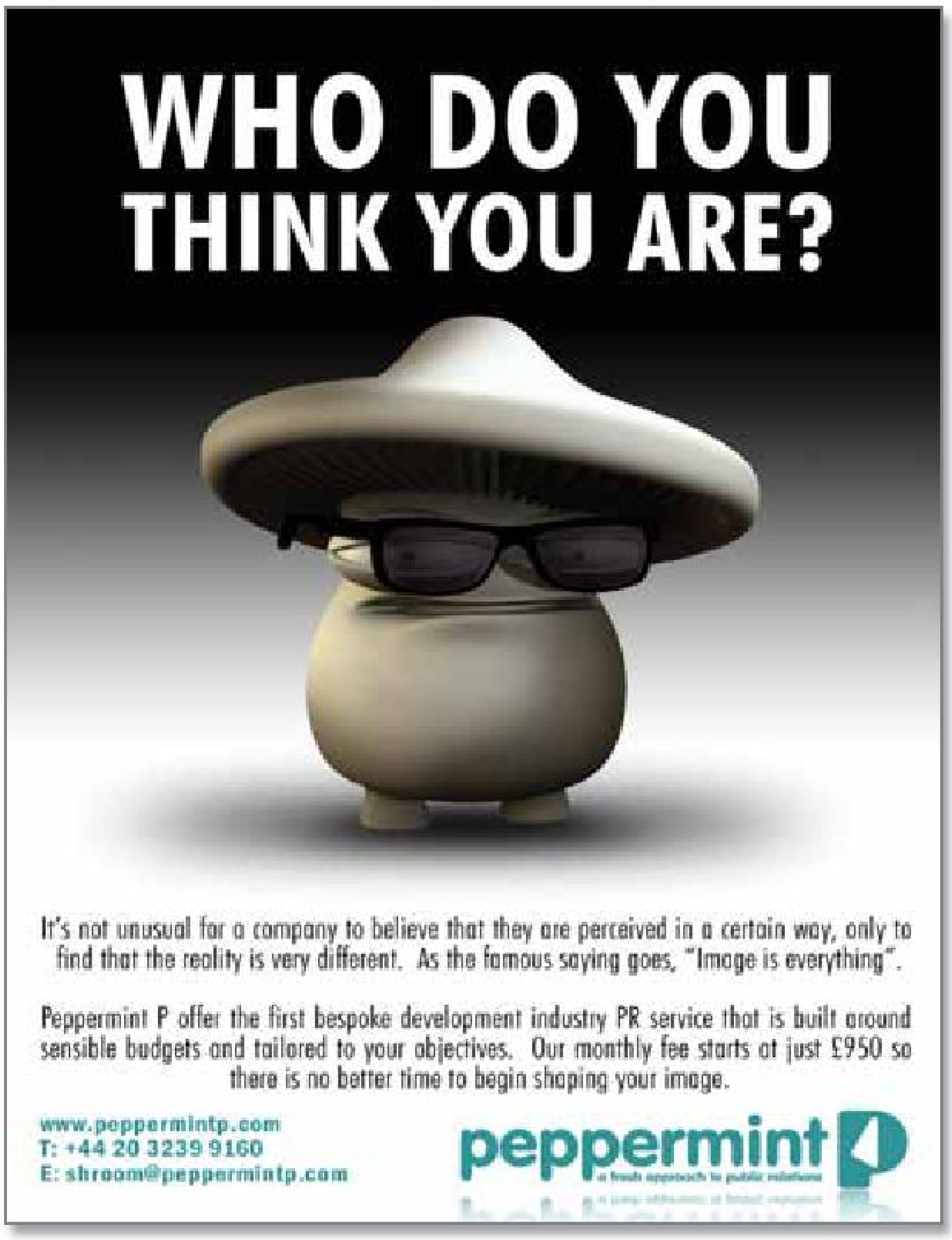

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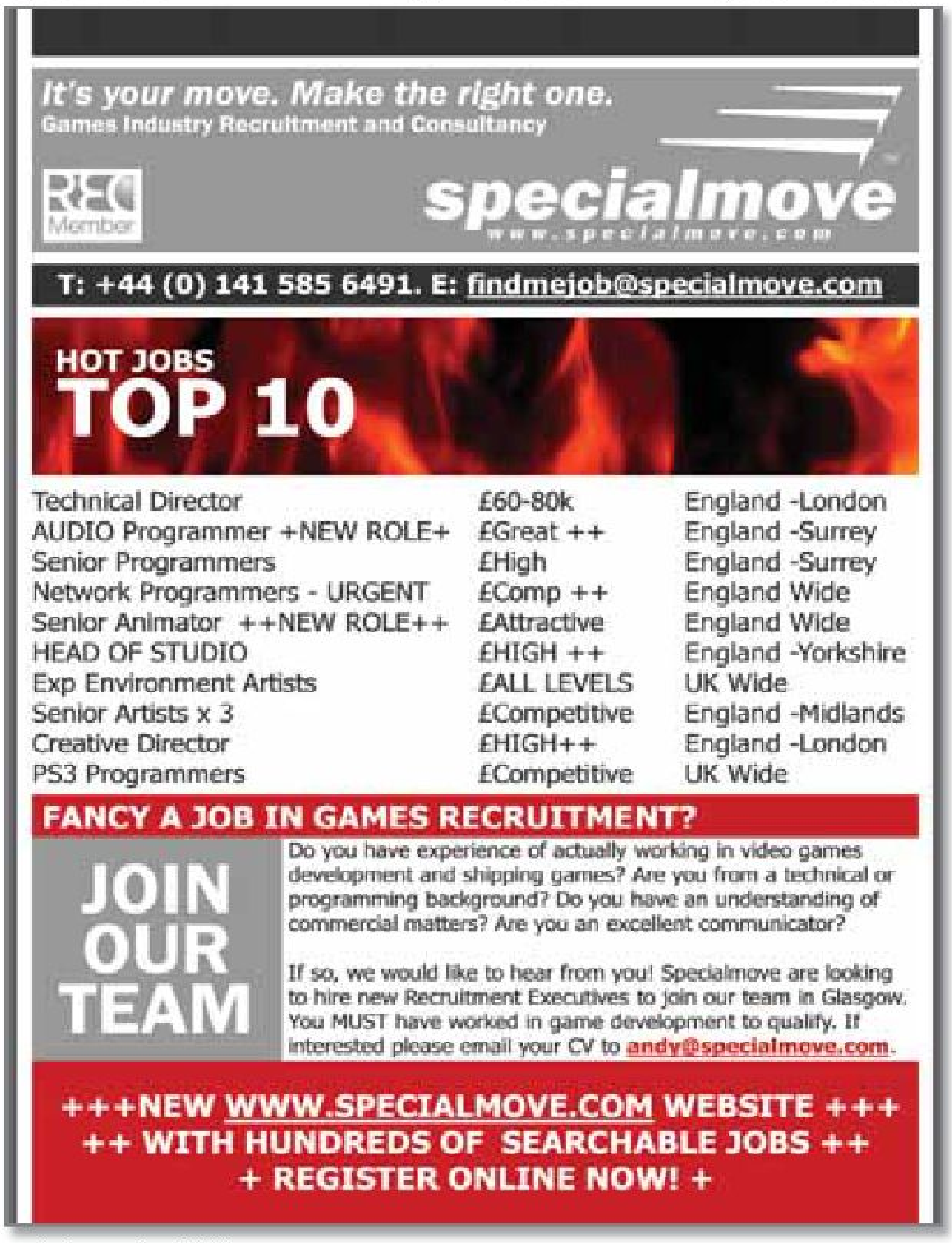

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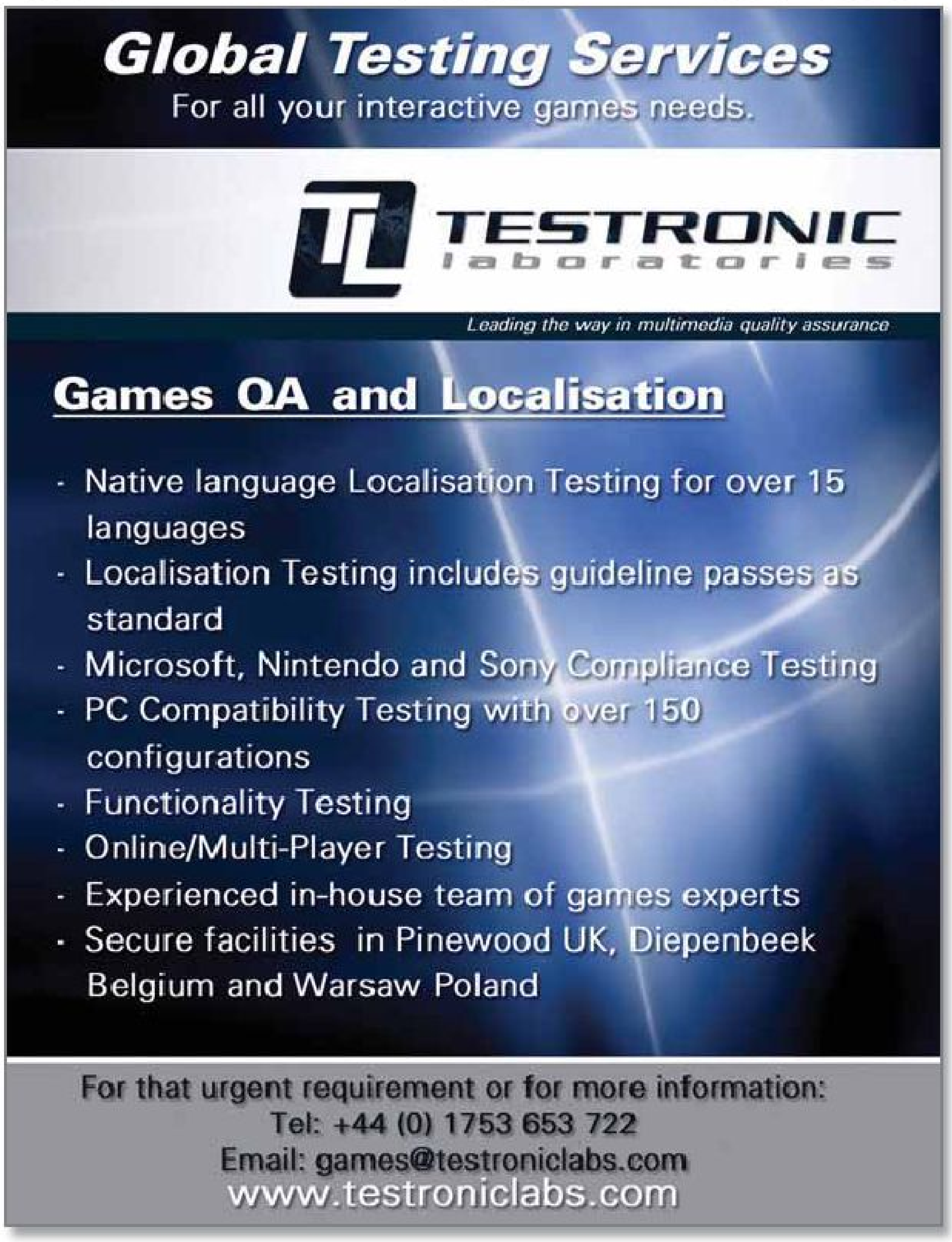

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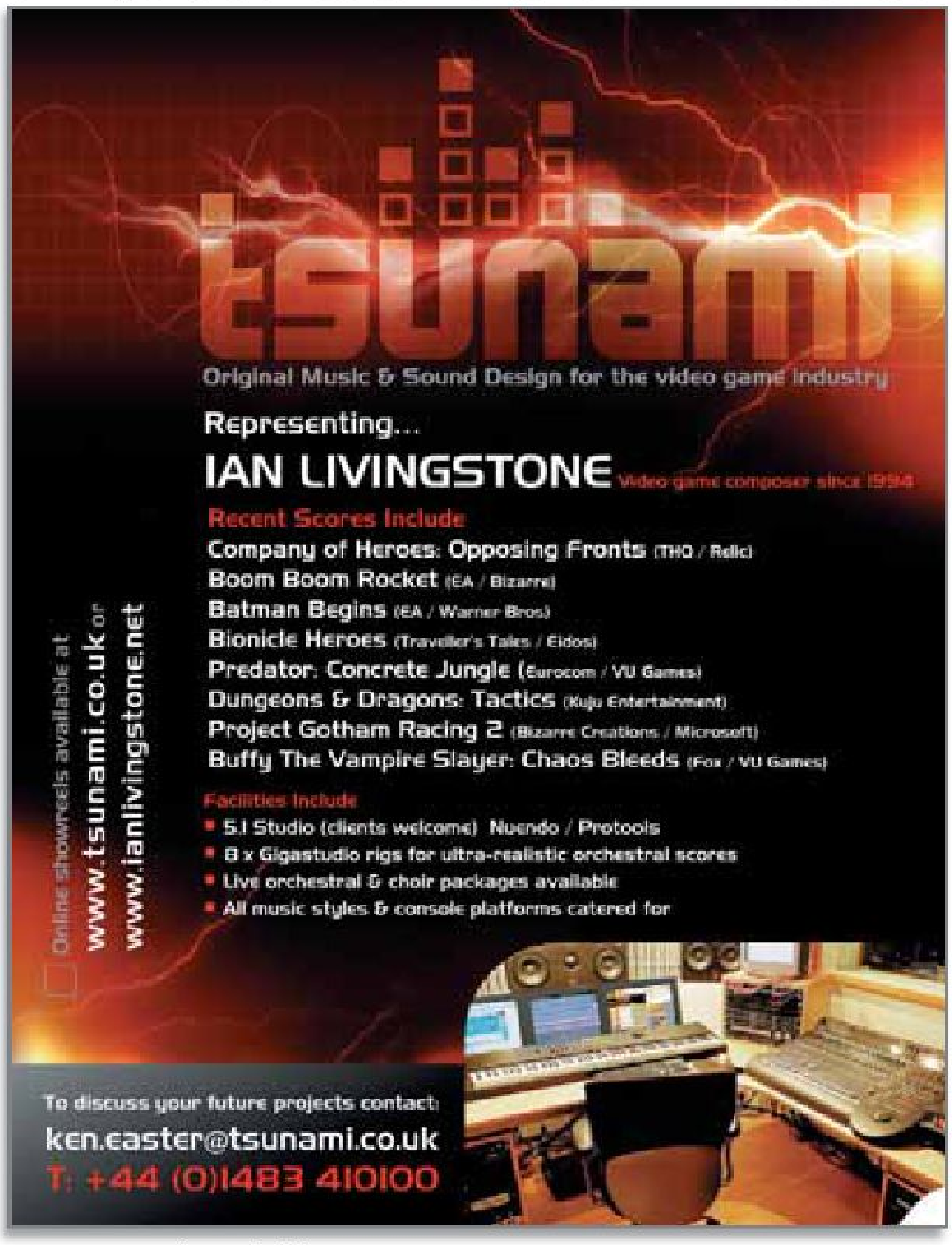
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Services Spotlight

AUDIOMOTION

FACTFILE
Area of expertise: Motion capture
Location: Oxford, United Kingdom
Founded: 1997
Number of Employees: 9
W: www.audiomotion.com

Audiomotion studios

Key Personnel: Mick Morris (managing director), Brian Mitchell (operations director), James Witt (technical director)

Past customers:
- Blitz Games, Codemasters, Eurocom, Evolution, Guerilla Games

Currently working on:
- 10 major PS3 and Xbox 360 titles

Audiomotion is one of the world's leading motion capture service providers, and has been delivering top class animation for many global developers, publishers, movie producers and ad agencies for over a decade on projects for games, film and TV.

Its studio, powered by a state of the art Vicon system, is one the largest and most advanced in the world, making the company a first choice provider for many developers and publishers, including well known names such as SCEE, Microsoft, Vivendi, LucasArts, Disney, Warner Bros and New Line Cinema amongst others.

Now after ten years in the business, the company has recently increased its camera count to 70 – meaning more flexibility and the ability to deliver cutting-edge full performance capture, an increasingly requested technique that simultaneously captures multiple faces, hands, full-body and audio to provide a movie-like level of performance. The 60 square metre studio gives enough space to capture large scale movement of both people and animals at up to 240 frames per second – or, if customers' needs are more mobile, the studio can be quickly relocated to any other location.

In addition to the actual capture process, Audiomotion also provide a project assessment service in which the project's needs are detailed and test shoots may even be performed. The firm can also source actors and artists, prepare for the capturing of any props and even prepare and adapt custom skeletons.

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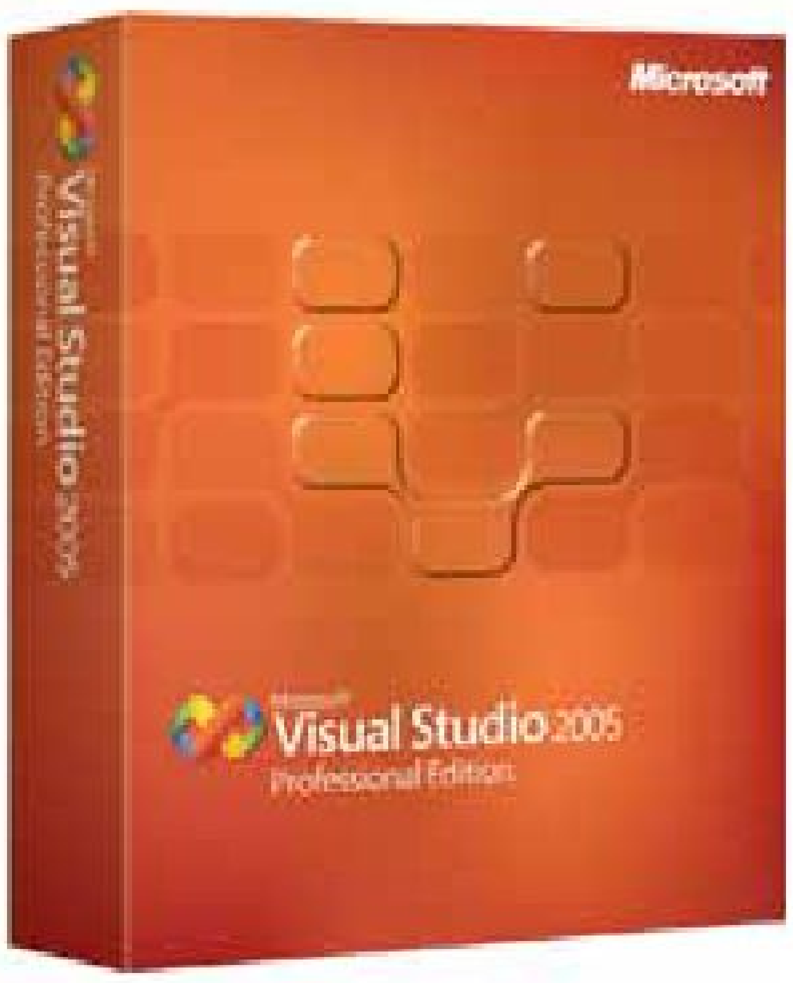
Training News

Microsoft unveils DreamSpark initiative



Bill Gates has unveiled a new free software scheme for students that gives them development tools as is designed to 'unlock their creative potential and set them on the path to academic and career success'.

Called Microsoft DreamSpark, the student program makes a range of development and design tools available for free. Microsoft said that software is available to 35 million students studying around the world in 10 countries (Belgium, China, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the U.K. and the US). More territories will be added throughout the year.

DreamSpark is available to all students whose studies touch on technology, design, math, science and engineering.

Specifically for game development, the developer tools available are Visual Studio 2005 Pro and Visual Studio 2008 Pro, plus XNA Game Studio 2.0. Students also get a free Academic membership for the XNA Creators Club. Microsoft said this move meant students would "be able to invent compelling new gaming content and make their dream game a reality by porting their creations to their Xbox 360 console."

"We want to do everything we can to equip a new generation of technology leaders with the knowledge and tools they need to harness the magic of software to improve lives, solve problems and catalyse economic growth," Gates said.

"Microsoft DreamSpark provides professional-level tools that we hope will inspire students to explore the power of software and encourage them to forge the next wave of software-driven breakthroughs."

downloads.channel8.msdn.com

SOFTIMAGE OPENS COMMUNITY SITE

SOFTIMAGE

Softimage has lifted the veil on its new artist-focused community site, SoftimageINET, designed to connect XSI artists and students to facilitate learning. Currently in beta, the site offers forums, galleries, script and plug-in exchange areas and a job forum to help XSI users find work.

"The SoftimageINET site was created for the growing community of 3D artists to provide a centralized connecting point," said Marc Stevens, general manager of Softimage and vice president of Avid Technology.

"All members registered to SoftimageINET will get access to special beginner-through-advanced training materials, along with a connection to professional studios that are searching for XSI 3D artists. Gallery pages on SoftimageINET will provide an outlet where artists can post finished and unfinished or concept 3D artwork to engage the global network of XSI artists and enthusiasts for feedback, technical suggestions and encouragement."

community.softimage.com

DERBY WELCOMES NEW LECTURERS

The University of Derby's games programme has been boosted as two new games industry professionals join its teaching staff.

David Wilson (*pictured left*) joins the BA (Hons) in Computer Games Modelling and Animation course having previously worked as lead artist on Evolution's PS3 hit *MotorStorm*, while Adam Russell (*right*) will be participating in the BSc (Hons) in Computer Games Programming course, moving from Eurocom and prior to that Lionhead, where he worked on *Fable*'s AI.

Russell said: "It is high time that industry insiders got more involved with creating games development degrees that really serve the needs of the UK business. This can only be done if industry experts actually come out of the studios and personally design and deliver the right degree courses. This is exactly what is happening at the University of Derby."

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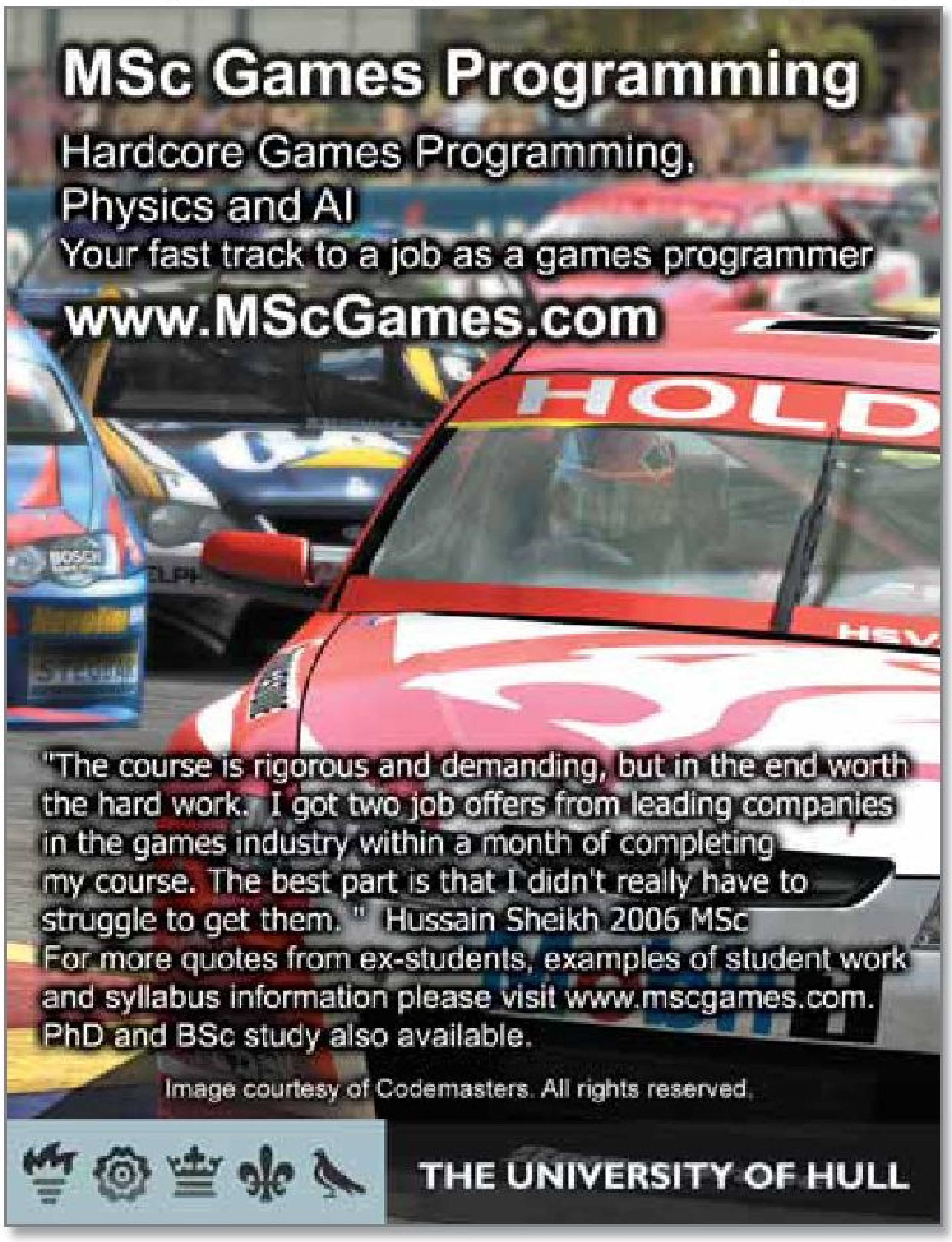

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"The course is rigorous and demanding, but in the end worth the hard work. I got two job offers from leading companies in the games industry within a month of completing my course. The best part is that I didn't really have to struggle to get them." Hussain Sheikh 2006 MSc
For more quotes from ex-students, examples of student work and syllabus information please visit www.mscgames.com.
PhD and BSc study also available.

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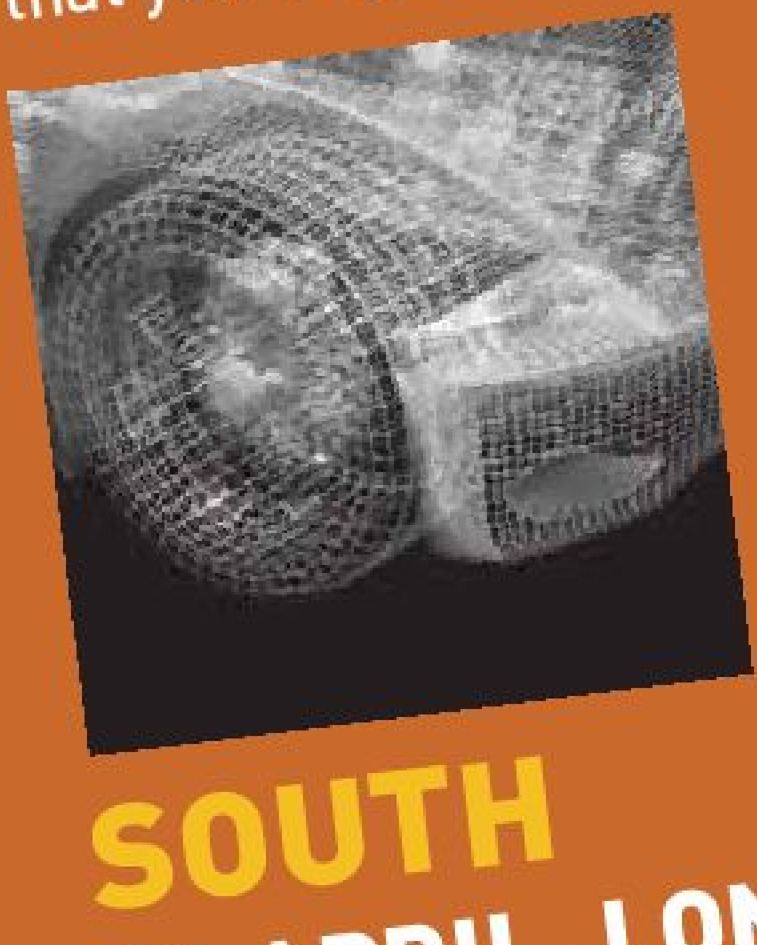

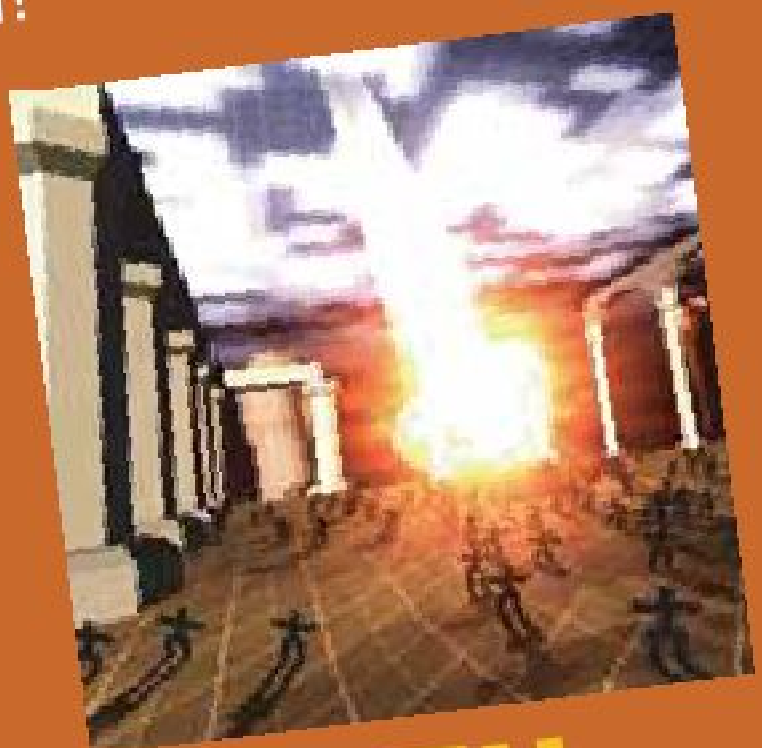

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THE BYRONIC MAN

X-asperating, X-crable, and always X-rated: it's **Simon Byron**…

It's a little-known fact that when William The Conquerer invaded the kingdom of England back in 1066, he shot King Harold in the eye with an arrow not because he was the current English monarch, but because he was one of those idiots that liked rugby.

The Norman Conquest wasn't necessarily a land-grab; it was simply a tour of pre-season friendies. William brought his boots, a ball and four knitted jumpers, and despite the off-pitch violence, history records 1066 as the first successful international football tournament. France beat England, and won England as a result.

The savages soon set about producing a nation of mongrels. Mongrels who began to like football.

Of course, it wasn't football immediately. It was introduced as 'mob football', where teams comprising an unlimited number of players from neighbouring villages went head to head, the winner being the side that successfully manoeuvred a pig's bladder into a specific location.

The pig bladder was used not by request, mind. The rules governing the size, weight and pressure of a regulation football hadn't been specified, and kicking the insides out of swines seemed much simpler than doing so.

As technology evolved, so did every aspect of the game – until it was refined and improved, eventually becoming the most popular sport in the world.

Which was brilliant, but also a problem. Football was becoming so profitable, it was only a matter of time before other organisations decided they'd own a piece of it.

Microsoft's X-Soccer was perhaps the most ambitious. Played on X-pitches by X-players kicking X-balls, it was, the firm claimed, the most powerful version of football ever produced. You could tell this because the pitch was bigger than anything before it. And it continued making a noise even when no-one was playing on it.

Microsoft promised that it would support this new version of football for ages. It sold a reasonable amount of black X-football boots to a reasonable amount of people. But just three years later, it decided that, actually, everyone else should be playing with white X-boots, which it said were definitely were better in every way. They had space for more toes and stuff like that.

Of course, you could continue to bring your old black boots to the X-pitches, but they'd make you run slowly and you'd look well ugly compared to everyone else. Phil Neville and Wayne Rooney were perhaps the best examples of original X-football players.

> **"Microsoft promised, promised, promised that this would be the best thing ever…"**

Making everyone play in white wasn't quite enough for Microsoft. Instead, they decided to argue that everyone needed special eyes to play X-football properly. You could do that quite easily by upgrading to some special X-Goggles. These cost 130 quid, and looked rubbish – sat on top of the head, and connected to the eyes by a lead. Still, Microsoft promised, promised, promised this'd be the best thing ever and much better than anyone else's. Footballers – so often seduced by new game technology – bought more of these goggles than anyone else, dreaming of a time where these new accessories would become de rigueur, justifying their awkward outlay.

And then 14 months later, Microsoft said it hasn't sold as many of these goggles as it had liked and therefore everyone who'd bought one had wasted their money.

A few months later, Microsoft announced its next innovation in football. A pitch which was always on, always connected. More players playing more games of football than ever before. And it genuinely was the best version of football ever invented. They'd even not been stupid enough to meddle with the number of games in the league.

And what did the football players – the ones who'd previously believed that Microsoft were going to make their game better than ever – do? Having wasted money funding the R&D of Microsoft's first pitch, then paid through the nose for some vanity project designed to see if the firm could enforce a maverick technology on the rest of the world, they did the only sensible thing.

They took their ball back and played elsewhere.

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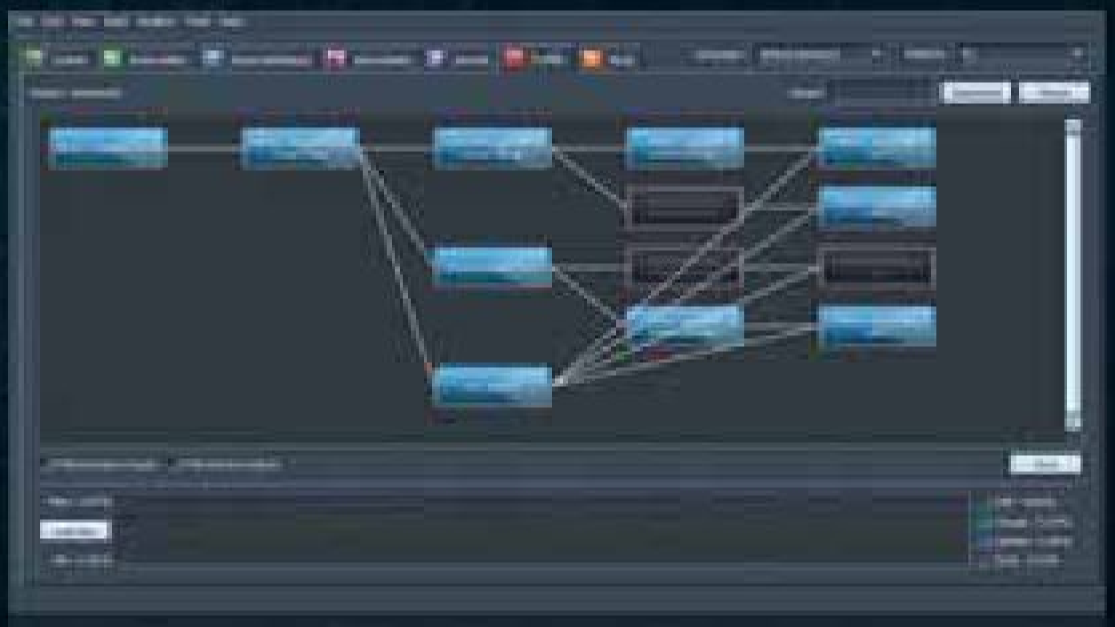

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